THE WORLD'S FIFTY BEST SHORT NOVELS

[IN TEN VOLUMES]

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VOLUME FIVE

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK and LONDON

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THE WORLD'S 50 BEST SHORT NOVELS

COMING, APHRODITE!

By Willa Cather

I

Don Hedger had lived for four years on the top floor of an old house on the south side of Washington Square, and nobody had ever disturbed him. He occupied one big room with no outside exposure except on the north, where he had built in a many-paned studio window that looked upon a court and upon the roofs and walls of other buildings. His room was very cheerless, since he never got a ray of direct sunlight; the south corners were always in shadow. In one of the corners was a clothes closet, built against the partition, in another a wide divan, serving as a seat by day and a bed by night. In the front corner, the one farther from the window, was a sink, and a table with two gas burners where he sometimes cooked his food. There, too, in the perpetual dusk, was the dog's bed, and often a bone or two for his comfort.

The dog was a Boston bull terrier, and Hedger explained his surly disposition by the fact that he had been bred to the point where it told on his nerves. His name was Caesar III, and he had taken

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prizes at very exclusive dog shows. When he and his master went out to prowl about University Place or to promenade along West Street, Caesar III was invariably fresh and shining. His pink skin showed through his mottled coat, which glistened as if it had just been rubbed with olive oil, and he wore a brass-studded collar, bought at the smartest saddler's. Hedger, as often as not, was hunched up in an old striped blanket coat, with a shapeless felt hat pulled over his bushy hair, wearing black shoes that had become grey, or brown ones that had become black, and he never put on gloves unless the day was biting cold.

Early in May, Hedger learned that he was to have a new neighbour in the rear apartment—two rooms, one large and one small, that faced the west. His studio was shut off from the larger of these rooms by double doors, which, though they were fairly tight, left him a good deal at the mercy of the occupant. The rooms had been leased, long before he came there, by a trained nurse who considered herself knowing in old furniture. She went to auction sales and bought up mahogany and dirty brass and stored it away here, where she meant to live when she retired from nursing. Meanwhile, she sublet her rooms, with their precious furniture, to young people who came to New York to "write" or to "paint"—who proposed to live by the sweat of the brow rather than of the hand, and who desired artistic surroundings. When Hedger first moved in, these rooms were occupied by a young man who tried to write plays,—and who kept on trying until a week ago, when the nurse had put him out for unpaid rent.

A few days after the playwright left, Hedger heard an ominous murmur of voices through the bolted double doors: the lady-like intonation of the nurse—doubtless exhibiting her treasures—and another voice, also a woman's, but very different; young, fresh, unguarded, confident. All the same, it would be very annoying to have a woman in there. The only bath-room on the floor was at the top of the stairs in the front hall, and he would always be running into her as he came or went from his bath. He would have to be more careful to see that Caesar didn't leave bones about the hall, too; and she might object when he cooked steak and onions on his gas burner.

As soon as the talking ceased and the women left, he forgot them. He was absorbed in a study of paradise fish at the Aquarium, staring out at people through the glass and green water of their tank. It was a highly gratifying idea; the incommunicability of one stratum of animal life with another,—though Hedger pretended it was only an experiment in unusual lighting. When he heard trunks knocking against the sides of the narrow hall, then he realized that she was moving in at once. Toward noon, groans and deep gasps and the creaking of ropes, made him aware that a piano was arriving. After the tramp of the movers died away down the stairs, somebody touched off a few scales and chords on the instrument, and then there was peace. Presently he heard her lock her door and go down the hall humming something; going out to lunch, probably. He stuck his brushes in a can of turpentine and put on his hat, not stopping to wash his hands. Caesar was smelling along the crack under

the bolted doors; his bony tail stuck out hard as a hickory withe, and the hair was standing up about his elegant collar.

Hedger encouraged him. "Come along, Caesar. You'll soon get used to a new smell."

In the hall stood an enormous trunk, behind the ladder that led to the roof, just opposite Hedger's door. The dog flew at it with a growl of hurt amazement. They went down three flights of stairs and out into the brilliant May afternoon.

Behind the Square, Hedger and his dog descended into a basement oyster house where there were no tablecloths on the tables and no handles on the coffee cups, and the floor was covered with sawdust, and Caesar was always welcome,—not that he needed any such precautionary flooring. All the carpets of Persia would have been safe for him. Hedger ordered steak and onions absent-mindedly, not realizing why he had an apprehension that this dish might be less readily at hand hereafter. While he ate, Caesar sat beside his chair, gravely disturbing the sawdust with his tail.

After lunch Hedger strolled about the Square for the dog's health and watched the stages pull out; —that was almost the very last summer of the old horse stages on Fifth Avenue. The fountain had but lately begun operations for the season and was throwing up a mist of rainbow water which now and then blew south and sprayed a bunch of Italian babies that were being supported on the outer rim by older, very little older, brothers and sisters. Plump robins were hopping about on the soil; the grass was newly cut and blindingly green. Looking up the Avenue through the Arch, one could see the

young poplars with their bright, sticky leaves, and the Brevoort glistening in its spring coat of paint, and shining horses and carriages,—occasionally an automobile, mis-shapen and sullen, like an ugly threat in a stream of things that were bright and beautiful and alive.

While Caesar and his master were standing by the fountain, a girl approached them, crossing the Square. Hedger noticed her because she wore a lavender cloth suit and carried in her arms a big bunch of fresh lilacs. He saw that she was young and handsome,—beautiful, in fact, with a splendid figure and good action. She, too, paused by the fountain and looked back through the Arch up the Avenue. She smiled rather patronizingly as she looked, and at the same time seemed delighted. Her slowly curving upper lip and half-closed eyes seemed to say: "You're gay, you're exciting, you are quite the right sort of thing; but you're none too fine for me!"

In the moment she tarried, Caesar stealthily approached her and sniffed at the hem of her lavender skirt, then, when she went south like an arrow, he ran back to his master and lifted a face full of emotion and alarm, his lower lip twitching under his sharp white teeth and his hazel eyes pointed with a very definite discovery. He stood thus, motionless, while Hedger watched the lavender girl go up the steps and through the door of the house in which he lived.

"You're right, my boy, it's she! She might be worse looking, you know."

When they mounted to the studio, the new lodger's door, at the back of the hall, was a little ajar, and Hedger caught the warm perfume of lilacs just

brought in out of the sun. He was used to the musty smell of the old hall carpet. (The nurse-lessee had once knocked at his studio door and complained that Caesar must be somewhat responsible for the particular flavour of that mustiness, and Hedger had never spoken to her since.) He was used to the old smell, and he preferred it to that of the lilacs, and so did his companion, whose nose was so much more discriminating. Hedger shut his door vehemently, and fell to work.

Most young men who dwell in obscure studios in New York have had a beginning, come out of something, have somewhere a home town, a family, a paternal roof. But Don Hedger had no such background. He was a foundling, and had grown up in a school for homeless boys, where book-learning was a negligible part of the curriculum. When he was sixteen, a Catholic priest took him to Greensburg, Pennsylvania, to keep house for him. The priest did something to fill in the large gaps in the boy's education,—taught him to like "Don Quixote" and "The Golden Legend," and encouraged him to mess with paints and crayons in his room up under the slope of the mansard. When Don wanted to go to New York to study at the Art League, the priest got him a night job as packer in one of the big department stores. Since then, Hedger had taken care of himself; that was his only responsibility. He was singularly unencumbered; had no family duties, no social ties, no obligations toward any one but his landlord. Since he travelled light, he had travelled rather far. He had got over a good deal of the earth's surface, in spite of the fact that he never in his life had more than three hundred dollars ahead

at any one time, and he had already outlived a succession of convictions and revelations about his art.

Though he was now but twenty-six years old, he had twice been on the verge of becoming a marketable product; once through some studies of New York streets he did for a magazine, and once through a collection of pastels he brought home from New Mexico, which Remington, then at the height of his popularity, happened to see, and generously tried to push. But on both occasions Hedger decided that this was something he didn't wish to carry further, —simply the old thing over again and got nowhere, —so he took enquiring dealers experiments in a "later manner," that made them put him out of the shop. When he ran short of money, he could always get any amount of commercial work; he was an expert draughtsman and worked with lightning speed. The rest of his time he spent in groping his way from one kind of painting into another, or travelling about without luggage, like a tramp, and he was chiefly occupied with getting rid of ideas he had once thought very fine.

Hedger's circumstances, since he had moved to Washington Square, were affluent compared to anything he had ever known before. He was now able to pay advance rent and turn the key on his studio when he went away for four months at a stretch. It didn't occur to him to wish to be richer than this. To be sure, he did without a great many things other people think necessary, but he didn't miss them, because he had never had them. He belonged to no clubs, visited no houses, had no studio friends, and he ate his dinner alone in some decent little restaurant, even on Christmas and New Year's. For

days together he talked to nobody but his dog and the janitress and the lame oysterman.

After he shut the door and settled down to his paradise fish on that first Tuesday in May, Hedger forgot all about his new neighbour. When the light failed, he took Caesar out for a walk. On the way home he did his marketing on West Houston Street, with a one-eyed Italian woman who always cheated him. After he had cooked his beans and scallopini, and drunk half a bottle of Chianti, he put his dishes in the sink and went up on the roof to smoke. He was the only person in the house who ever went to the roof, and he had a secret understanding with the janitress about it. He was to have "the privilege of the roof," as she said, if he opened the heavy trapdoor on sunny days to air out the upper hall, and was watchful to close it when rain threatened. Mrs. Foley was fat and dirty and hated to climb stairs,—besides, the roof was reached by a perpendicular iron ladder, definitely inaccessible to a woman of her bulk, and the iron door at the top of it was too heavy for any but Hedger's strong arm to lift. Hedger was not above medium height, but he practised with weights and dumb-bells, and in the shoulders he was as strong as a gorilla.

So Hedger had the roof to himself. He and Caesar often slept up there on hot nights, rolled in blankets he had brought home from Arizona. He mounted with Caesar under his left arm. The dog had never learned to climb a perpendicular ladder, and never did he feel so much his master's greatness and his own dependence upon him, as when he crept under his arm for this perilous ascent. Up there was even gravel to scratch in, and a dog could do what-

ever he liked, so long as he did not bark. It was a kind of Heaven, which no one was strong enough to reach but his great, paint-smelling master.

On this blue May night there was a slender, girlish looking young moon in the west, playing with a whole company of silver stars. Now and then one of them darted away from the group and shot off into the gauzy blue with a soft little trail of light, like laughter. Hedger and his dog were delighted when a star did this. They were quite lost in watching the glittering game, when they were suddenly diverted by a sound,—not from the stars, though it was music. It was not the Prologue to Pagliacci, which rose ever and anon on hot evenings from an Italian tenement on Thompson Street with the gasps of the corpulent baritone who got behind it; nor was it the hurdy-gurdy man, who often played at the corner in the balmy twilight. No, this was a woman's voice, singing the tempestuous, over-lapping phrases of Signor Puccini, then comparatively new in the world, but already so popular that even Hedger recognized his unmistakable gusts of breath. He looked about over the roofs; all was blue and still, with the well-built chimneys that were never used now standing up dark and mournful. He moved softly toward the yellow quadrangle where the gas from the hall shone up through the half-lifted trap-door. Oh yes! It came up through the hole like a strong draught, a big, beautiful voice, and it sounded rather like a professional's. A piano had arrived in the morning, Hedger remembered. This might be a very great nuisance. It would be pleasant enough to listen to, if you could turn it on and off as you wished;

but you couldn't. Caesar, with the gas light shining on his collar and his ugly but sensitive face, panted and looked up for information. Hedger put down a reassuring hand.

"I don't know. We can't tell yet. It may not be so bad."

He stayed on the roof until all was still below, and finally descended, with quite a new feeling about his neighbour. Her voice, like her figure, inspired respect,—if one did not choose to call it admiration. Her door was shut, the transom was dark; nothing remained of her but the obtrusive trunk, unrightfully taking up room in the narrow hall.

II

For two days Hedger didn't see her. He was painting eight hours a day just then, and only went out to hunt for food. He noticed that she practised scales and exercises for about an hour in the morning; then she locked her door, went humming down the hall, and left him in peace. He heard her getting her coffee ready at about the same time he got his. Earlier still, she passed his room on her way to her bath. In the evening she sometimes sang, but on the whole she didn't bother him. When he was working well he did not notice anything much. The morning paper lay before his door until he reached out for his milk bottle, then he kicked the sheet inside and it lay on the floor until evening. Sometimes he read it and sometimes he did not. He forgot there was anything of importance going on in the world outside of his third floor studio. Nobody had ever taught him that he ought to be interested

in other people; in the Pittsburgh steel strike, in the Fresh Air Fund, in the scandal about the Babies' Hospital. A grey wolf, living in a Wyoming canyon, would hardly have been less concerned about these things than was Don Hedger.

One morning he was coming out of the bathroom at the front end of the hall, having just given Caesar his bath and rubbed him into a glow with a heavy towel. Before the door, lying in wait for him, as it were, stood a tall figure in a flowing blue silk dressing gown that fell away from her marble arms. In her hands she carried various accessories of the bath.

"I wish," she said distinctly, standing in his way, "I wish you wouldn't wash your dog in the tub. I never heard of such a thing! I've found his hair in the tub, and I've smelled a doggy smell, and now I've caught you at it. It's an outrage!"

Hedger was badly frightened. She was so tall and positive, and was fairly blazing with beauty and anger. He stood blinking, holding on to his sponge and dog-soap, feeling that he ought to bow very low to her. But what he actually said was:

"Nobody has ever objected before. I always wash the tub,—and, anyhow, he's cleaner than most people."

"Cleaner than me?" her eyebrows went up, her white arms and neck and her fragrant person seemed to scream at him like a band of outraged nymphs. Something flashed through his mind about a man who was turned into a dog, or was pursued by dogs, because he unwittingly intruded upon the path of beauty.

"No, I didn't mean that," he muttered, turning

scarlet under the bluish stubble of his muscular jaws. "But I know he's cleaner than I am."

"That I don't doubt!" Her voice sounded like a soft shivering of crystal, and with a smile of pity she drew the folds of her voluminous blue robe close about her and allowed the wretched man to pass. Even Caesar was frightened; he darted like a streak down the hall, through the door and to his own bed in the corner among the bones.

Hedger stood still in the doorway, listening to indignant sniffs and coughs and a great swishing of water about the sides of the tub. He had washed it; but as he had washed it with Caesar's sponge, it was quite possible that a few bristles remained; the dog was shedding now. The playwright had never objected, nor had the jovial illustrator who occupied the front apartment,—but he, as he admitted, "was usually pye-eyed, when he wasn't in Buffalo." He went home to Buffalo sometimes to rest his nerves.

It had never occurred to Hedger that any one would mind using the tub after Caesar;—but then, he had never seen a beautiful girl caparisoned for the bath before. As soon as he beheld her standing there, he realized the unfitness of it. For that matter, she ought not to step into a tub that any other mortal had bathed in; the illustrator was sloppy and left cigarette ends on the moulding.

All morning as he worked he was gnawed by a spiteful desire to get back at her. It rankled that he had been so vanquished by her disdain. When he heard her locking her door to go out for lunch, he stepped quickly into the hall in his messy painting coat, and addressed her.

"I don't wish to be exigent, Miss,"—he had certain grand words that he used upon occasion—"but if this is your trunk, it's rather in the way here."

"Oh, very well!" she exclaimed carelessly, dropping her keys into her handbag. "I'll have it moved when I can get a man to do it," and she went down the hall with her free, roving stride.

Her name, Hedger discovered from her letters, which the postman left on the table in the lower hall, was Eden Bower.

III

In the closet that was built against the partition separating his room from Miss Bower's, Hedger kept all his wearing apparel, some of it on hooks and hangers, some of it on the floor. When he opened his closet now-a-days, little dust-coloured insects flew out on downy wing, and he suspected that a brood of moths were hatching in his winter overcoat. Mrs. Foley, the janitress, told him to bring down all his heavy clothes and she would give them a beating and hang them in the court. The closet was in such disorder that he shunned the encounter, but one hot afternoon he set himself to the task. First he threw out a pile of forgotten laundry and tied it up in a sheet. The bundle stood as high as his middle when he had knotted the corners. Then he got his shoes and overshoes together. When he took his overcoat from its place against the partition, a long ray of yellow light shot across the dark enclosure,—a knot hole, evidently, in the high wainscoting of the west room. He had never noticed

it before, and without realizing what he was doing, he stooped and squinted through it.

Yonder, in a pool of sunlight, stood his new neighbour, wholly unclad, doing exercises of some sort before a long gilt mirror. Hedger did not happen to think how unpardonable it was of him to watch her. Nudity was not improper to any one who had worked so much from the figure, and he continued to look, simply because he had never seen a woman's body so beautiful as this one,—positively glorious in action. As she swung her arms and changed from one pivot of motion to another, muscular energy seemed to flow through her from her toes to her finger-tips. The soft flush of exercise and the gold of afternoon sun played over her flesh together, enveloped her in a luminous mist which, as she turned and twisted, made now an arm, now a shoulder, now a thigh, dissolve in pure light and instantly recover its outline with the next gesture. Hedger's fingers curved as if he were holding a crayon; mentally he was doing the whole figure in a single running line, and the charcoal seemed to explode in his hand at the point where the energy of each gesture was discharged into the whirling disc of light, from a foot or shoulder, from the upthrust chin or the lifted breasts.

He could not have told whether he watched her for six minutes or sixteen. When her gymnastics were over, she paused to catch up a lock of hair that had come down, and examined with solicitude a little reddish mole that grew under her left armpit. Then, with her hand on her hip, she walked unconcernedly across the room and disappeared through the door into her bedchamber.

Disappeared—Don Hedger was crouching on his knees, staring at the golden shower which poured in through the west windows, at the lake of gold sleeping on the faded Turkish carpet. The spot was enchanted; a vision out of Alexandria, out of the remote pagan past, had bathed itself there in Helianthine fire.

When he crawled out of his closet, he stood blinking at the grey sheet stuffed with laundry, not knowing what had happened to him. He felt a little sick as he contemplated the bundle. Everything here was different; he hated the disorder of the place, the grey prison light, his old shoes and himself and all his slovenly habits. The black calico curtains that ran on wires over his big window were white with dust. There were three greasy frying pans in the sink, and the sink itself— He felt desperate. He couldn't stand this another minute. He took up an armful of winter clothes and ran down four flights into the basement.

"Mrs. Foley," he began, "I want my room cleaned this afternoon, thoroughly cleaned. Can you get a woman for me right away?"

"Is it company you're having?" the fat, dirty janitress enquired. Mrs. Foley was the widow of a useful Tammany man, and she owned real estate in Flatbush. She was huge and soft as a feather bed. Her face and arms were permanently coated with dust, grained like wood where the sweat had trickled.

"Yes, company. That's it."

"Well, this is a queer time of the day to be asking for a cleaning woman. It's likely I can get you old Lizzie, if she's not drunk. I'll send Willy round to see."

Willy, the son of fourteen, roused from the stupor and stain of his fifth box of cigarettes by the gleam of a quarter, went out. In five minutes he returned with old Lizzie,—she smelling strong of spirits and wearing several jackets which she had put on one over the other, and a number of skirts, long and short, which made her resemble an animated dish-clout. She had, of course, to borrow her equipment from Mrs. Foley, and toiled up the long flights, dragging mop and pail and broom. She told Hedger to be of good cheer, for he had got the right woman for the job, and showed him a great leather strap she wore about her wrist to prevent dislocation of tendons. She swished about the place, scattering dust and splashing soapsuds, while he watched her in nervous despair. He stood over Lizzie and made her scour the sink, directing her roughly, then paid her and got rid of her. Shutting the door on his failure, he hurried off with his dog to lose himself among the stevedores and dock labourers on West Street.

A strange chapter began for Don Hedger. Day after day, at that hour in the afternoon, the hour before his neighbour dressed for dinner, he crouched down in his closet to watch her go through her mysterious exercises. It did not occur to him that his conduct was detestable; there was nothing shy or retreating about this unclad girl,—a bold body, studying itself quite coolly and evidently well pleased with itself, doing all this for a purpose. Hedger scarcely regarded his action as conduct at all; it was something that had happened to him. More than once he went out and tried to stay away for the whole afternoon, but at about five o'clock he was sure to

find himself among his old shoes in the dark. The pull of that aperture was stronger than his will,—and he had always considered his will the strongest thing about him. When she threw herself upon the divan and lay resting, he still stared, holding his breath. His nerves were so on edge that a sudden noise made him start and brought out the sweat on his forehead. The dog would come and tug at his sleeve, knowing that something was wrong with his master. If he attempted a mournful whine, those strong hands closed about his throat.

When Hedger came slinking out of his closet, he sat down on the edge of the couch, sat for hours without moving. He was not painting at all now. This thing, whatever it was, drank him up as ideas had sometimes done, and he sank into a stupor of idleness as deep and dark as the stupor of work. He could not understand it; he was no boy, he had worked from models for years, and a woman's body was no mystery to him. Yet now he did nothing but sit and think about one. He slept very little, and with the first light of morning he awoke as completely possessed by this woman as if he had been with her all the night before. The unconscious operations of life went on in him only to perpetuate this excitement. His brain held but one image now—vibrated, burned with it. It was a heathenish feeling; without friendliness, almost without tenderness.

Women had come and gone in Hedger's life. Not having had a mother to begin with, his relations with them, whether amorous or friendly, had been casual. He got on well with janitresses and wash-women, with Indians and with the peasant women of foreign countries. He had friends among

the silk-skirt factory girls who came to eat their lunch in Washington Square, and he sometimes took a model for a day in the country. He felt an unreasoning antipathy toward the well-dressed women he saw coming out of big shops, or driving in the Park. If, on his way to the Art Museum, he noticed a pretty girl standing on the steps of one of the houses on upper Fifth Avenue, he frowned at her and went by with his shoulders hunched up as if he were cold. He had never known such girls, or heard them talk, or seen the inside of the houses in which they lived; but he believed them all to be artificial and, in an aesthetic sense, perverted. He saw them enslaved by desire of merchandise and manufactured articles, effective only in making life complicated and insincere and in embroidering it with ugly and meaningless trivialities. They were enough, he thought, to make one almost forget woman as she existed in art, in thought, and in the universe.

He had no desire to know the woman who had, for the time at least, so broken up his life,—no curiosity about her every-day personality. He shunned any revelation of it, and he listened for Miss Bower's coming and going, not to encounter, but to avoid her. He wished that the girl who wore shirt-waists and got letters from Chicago would keep out of his way, that she did not exist. With her he had naught to make. But in a room full of sun, before an old mirror, on a little enchanted rug of sleeping colours, he had seen a woman who emerged naked through a door, and disappeared naked. He thought of that body as never having been clad, or as having worn the stuffs and dyes of all the centuries but his own. And for him she had no

geographical associations; unless with Crete, or Alexandria, or Veronese's Venice. She was the immortal conception, the perennial theme.

The first break in Hedger's lethargy occurred one afternoon when two young men came to take Eden Bower out to dine. They went into her music room, laughed and talked for a few minutes, and then took her away with them. They were gone a long while, but he did not go out for food himself; he waited for them to come back. At last he heard them coming down the hall, gayer and more talkative than when they left. One of them sat down at the piano, and they all began to sing. This Hedger found absolutely unendurable. He snatched up his hat and went running down the stairs. Caesar leaped beside him, hoping that old times were coming back. They had supper in the oysterman's basement and then sat down in front of their own doorway. The moon stood full over the Square, a thing of regal glory; but Hedger did not see the moon; he was looking, murderously, for men. Presently two, wearing straw hats and white trousers and carrying canes, came down the steps from his house. He rose and dogged them across the Square. They were laughing and seemed very much elated about something. As one stopped to light a cigarette, Hedger caught from the other:

"Don't you think she has a beautiful talent?"

His companion threw away his match. "She has a beautiful figure." They both ran to catch the stage.

Hedger went back to his studio. The light was shining from her transom. For the first time he violated her privacy at night, and peered through

that fatal aperture. She was sitting, fully dressed, in the window, smoking a cigarette and looking out over the housetops. He watched her until she rose, looked about her with a disdainful, crafty smile, and turned out the light.

The next morning, when Miss Bower went out, Hedger followed her. Her white skirt gleamed ahead of him as she sauntered about the Square. She sat down behind the Garibaldi statue and opened a music book she carried. She turned the leaves carelessly, and several times glanced in his direction. He was on the point of going over to her, when she rose quickly and looked up at the sky. A flock of pigeons had risen from somewhere in the crowded Italian quarter to the south, and were wheeling rapidly up through the morning air, soaring and dropping, scattering and coming together, now grey, now white as silver, as they caught or intercepted the sunlight. She put up her hand to shade her eyes and followed them with a kind of defiant delight in her face.

Hedger came and stood beside her. "You've surely seen them before?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, still looking up. "I see them every day from my windows. They always come home about five o'clock. Where do they live?"

"I don't know. Probably some Italian raises them for the market. They were here long before I came, and I've been here four years."

"In that same gloomy room? Why didn't you take mine when it was vacant?"

"It isn't gloomy. That's the best light for painting."

"Oh, is it? I don't know anything about painting. I'd like to see your pictures sometime. You

have such a lot in there. Don't they get dusty, piled up against the wall like that?"

"Not very. I'd be glad to show them to you. Is your name really Eden Bower? I've seen your letters on the table."

"Well, it's the name I'm going to sing under. My father's name is Bowers, but my friend Mr. Jones, a Chicago newspaper man who writes about music, told me to drop the 's.' He's crazy about my voice."

Miss Bower didn't usually tell the whole story, —about anything. Her first name, when she lived in Huntington, Illinois, was Edna, but Mr. Jones had persuaded her to change it to one which he felt would be worthy of her future. She was quick to take suggestions, though she told him she "didn't see what was the matter with 'Edna.'"

She explained to Hedger that she was going to Paris to study. She was waiting in New York for Chicago friends who were to take her over, but who had been detained. "Did you study in Paris?" she asked.

"No, I've never been in Paris. But I was in the south of France all last summer, studying with C——. He's the biggest man among the moderns, —at least I think so."

Miss Bower sat down and made room for him on the bench. "Do tell me about it. I expected to be there by this time, and I can't wait to find out what it's like."

Hedger began to relate how he had seen some of this Frenchman's work in an exhibition, and deciding at once that this was the man for him, he had taken a boat for Marseilles the next week, going over steerage. He proceeded at once to the little town

on the coast where his painter lived, and presented himself. The man never took pupils, but because Hedger had come so far, he let him stay. Hedger lived at the master's house and every day they went out together to paint, sometimes on the blazing rocks down by the sea. They wrapped themselves in light woollen blankets and didn't feel the heat. Being there and working with C—— was being in Paradise, Hedger concluded; he learned more in three months than in all his life before.

Eden Bower laughed. "You're a funny fellow. Didn't you do anything but work? Are the women very beautiful? Did you have awfully good things to eat and drink?"

Hedger said some of the women were fine looking, especially one girl who went about selling fish and lobsters. About the food there was nothing remarkable,—except the ripe figs, he liked those. They drank sour wine, and used goat-butter, which was strong and full of hair, as it was churned in a goat skin.

"But don't they have parties or banquets? Aren't there any fine hotels down there?"

"Yes, but they are all closed in summer, and the country people are poor. It's a beautiful country, though."

"How, beautiful?" she persisted.

"If you want to go in, I'll show you some sketches, and you'll see."

Miss Bower rose. "All right. I won't go to my fencing lesson this morning. Do you fence? Here comes your dog. You can't move but he's after you. He always makes a face at me when I meet him

in the hall, and shows his nasty little teeth as if he wanted to bite me."

In the studio Hedger got out his sketches, but to Miss Bower, whose favourite pictures were Christ Before Pilate and a redhaired Magdalen of Henner, these landscapes were not at all beautiful, and they gave her no idea of any country whatsoever. She was careful not to commit herself, however. Her vocal teacher had already convinced her that she had a great deal to learn about many things.

"Why don't we go out to lunch somewhere?" Hedger asked, and began to dust his fingers with a handkerchief—which he got out of sight as swiftly as possible.

"All right, the Brevoort," she said carelessly. "I think that's a good place, and they have good wine. I don't care for cocktails."

Hedger felt his chin uneasily. "I'm afraid I haven't shaved this morning. If you could wait for me in the Square? It won't take me ten minutes."

Left alone, he found a clean collar and handkerchief, brushed his coat and blacked his shoes, and last of all dug up ten dollars from the bottom of an old copper kettle he had brought from Spain. His winter hat was of such a complexion that the Brevoort hall boy winked at the porter as he took it and placed it on the rack in a row of fresh straw ones.

IV

That afternoon Eden Bower was lying on the couch in her music room, her face turned to the window, watching the pigeons. Reclining thus she could see none of the neighbouring roofs, only the

sky itself and the birds that crossed and recrossed her field of vision, white as scraps of paper blowing in the wind. She was thinking that she was young and handsome and had had a good lunch, that a very easy-going, light-hearted city lay in the streets below her; and she was wondering why she found this queer painter chap, with his lean, bluish cheeks and heavy black eyebrows, more interesting than the smart young men she met at her teacher's studio.

Eden Bower was, at twenty, very much the same person that we all know her to be at forty, except that she knew a great deal less. But one thing she knew: that she was to be Eden Bower. She was like some one standing before a great show window full of beautiful and costly things, deciding which she will order. She understands that they will not all be delivered immediately, but one by one they will arrive at her door. She already knew some of the many things that were to happen to her; for instance, that the Chicago millionaire who was going to take her abroad with his sister as chaperone, would eventually press his claim in quite another manner. He was the most circumspect of bachelors, afraid of everything obvious, even of women who were too flagrantly handsome. He was a nervous collector of pictures and furniture, a nervous patron of music, and a nervous host; very cautious about his health, and about any course of conduct that might make him ridiculous. But she knew that he would at last throw all his precautions to the winds.

People like Eden Bower are inexplicable. Her father sold farming machinery in Huntington, Illinois, and she had grown up with no acquaintances

or experiences outside of that prairie town. Yet from her earliest childhood she had not one conviction or opinion in common with the people about her,—the only people she knew. Before she was out of short dresses she had made up her mind that she was going to be an actress, that she would live far away in great cities, that she would be much admired by men and would have everything she wanted. When she was thirteen, and was already singing and reciting for church entertainments, she read in some illustrated magazine a long article about the late Czar of Russia, then just come to the throne or about to come to it. After that, lying in the hammock on the front porch on summer evenings, or sitting through a long sermon in the family pew, she amused herself by trying to make up her mind whether she would or would not be the Czar's mistress when she played in his Capital. Now Edna had met this fascinating word only in the novels of Ouida,—her hard-worked little mother kept a long row of them in the upstairs store-room, behind the linen chest. In Huntington, women who bore that relation to men were called by a very different name, and their lot was not an enviable one; of all the shabby and poor, they were the shabbiest. But then, Edna had never lived in Huntington, not even before she began to find books like "Sapho" and "Mademoiselle de Maupin," secretly sold in paper covers throughout Illinois. It was as if she had come into Huntington, into the Bowers family, on one of the trains that puffed over the marshes behind their back fence all day long, and was waiting for another train to take her out.

As she grew older and handsomer, she had many

beaux, but these small-town boys didn't interest her. If a lad kissed her when he brought her home from a dance, she was indulgent and she rather liked it. But if he pressed her further, she slipped away from him, laughing. After she began to sing in Chicago, she was consistently discreet. She stayed as a guest in rich people's houses, and she knew that she was being watched like a rabbit in a laboratory. Covered up in bed, with the lights out, she thought her own thoughts, and laughed.

This summer in New York was her first taste of freedom. The Chicago capitalist, after all his arrangements were made for sailing, had been compelled to go to Mexico to look after oil interests. His sister knew an excellent singing master in New York. Why should not a discreet, well-balanced girl like Miss Bower spend the summer there, studying quietly? The capitalist suggested that his sister might enjoy a summer on Long Island; he would rent the Griffith's place for her, with all the servants, and Eden could stay there. But his sister met this proposal with a cold stare. So it fell out, that between selfishness and greed, Eden got a summer all her own,—which really did a great deal toward making her an artist and whatever else she was afterward to become. She had time to look about, to watch without being watched; to select diamonds in one window and furs in another, to select shoulders and moustaches in the big hotels where she went to lunch. She had the easy freedom of obscurity and the consciousness of power. She enjoyed both. She was in no hurry.

While Eden Bower watched the pigeons, Don Hedger sat on the other side of the bolted doors,

looking into a pool of dark turpentine, at his idle brushes, wondering why a woman could do this to him. He, too, was sure of his future and knew that he was a chosen man. He could not know, of course, that he was merely the first to fall under a fascination which was to be disastrous to a few men and pleasantly stimulating to many thousands. Each of these two young people sensed the future, but not completely. Don Hedger knew that nothing much would ever happen to him. Eden Bower understood that to her a great deal would happen. But she did not guess that her neighbour would have more tempestuous adventures sitting in his dark studio than she would find in all the capitals of Europe, or in all the latitude of conduct she was prepared to permit herself.

V

One Sunday morning Eden was crossing the Square with a spruce young man in a white flannel suit and a panama hat. They had been breakfasting at the Brevoort and he was coaxing her to let him come up to her rooms and sing for an hour.

"No, I've got to write letters. You must run along now. I see a friend of mine over there, and I want to ask him about something before I go up."

"That fellow with the dog? Where did you pick him up?" the young man glanced toward the seat under a sycamore where Hedger was reading the morning paper.

"Oh, he's an old friend from the West," said Eden easily. "I won't introduce you, because he doesn't like people. He's a recluse. Good-bye. I can't be sure about Tuesday. I'll go with you if I

have time after my lesson." She nodded, left him, and went over to the seat littered with newspapers. The young man went up the Avenue without looking back.

"Well, what are you going to do today? Shampoo this animal all morning?" Eden enquired teasingly.

Hedger made room for her on the seat. "No, at twelve o'clock I'm going out to Coney Island. One of my models is going up in a balloon this afternoon. I've often promised to go and see her, and now I'm going."

Eden asked if models usually did such stunts. No, Hedger told her, but Molly Welch added to her earnings in that way. "I believe," he added, "she likes the excitement of it. She's got a good deal of spirit. That's why I like to paint her. So many models have flaccid bodies."

"And she hasn't, eh? Is she the one who comes to see you? I can't help hearing her, she talks so loud."

"Yes, she has a rough voice, but she's a fine girl. I don't suppose you'd be interested in going?"

"I don't know," Eden sat tracing patterns on the asphalt with the end of her parasol. "Is it any fun? I got up feeling I'd like to do something different today. It's the first Sunday I've not had to sing in church. I had that engagement for breakfast at the Brevoort, but it wasn't very exciting. That chap can't talk about anything but himself."

Hedger warmed a little. "If you've never been to Coney Island, you ought to go. It's nice to see all the people; tailors and bar-tenders and prize-

fighters with their best girls, and all sorts of folks taking a holiday."

Eden looked sidewise at him. So one ought to be interested in people of that kind, ought one? He was certainly a funny fellow. Yet he was never, somehow, tiresome. She had seen a good deal of him lately, but she kept wanting to know him better, to find out what made him different from men like the one she had just left—whether he really was as different as he seemed. "I'll go with you," she said at last, "if you'll leave that at home." She pointed to Caesar's flickering ears with her sunshade.

"But he's half the fun. You'd like to hear him bark at the waves when they come in."

"No, I wouldn't. He's jealous and disagreeable if he sees you talking to any one else. Look at him now."

"Of course, if you make a face at him. He knows what that means, and he makes a worse face. He likes Molly Welch, and she'll be disappointed if I don't bring him."

Eden said decidedly that he couldn't take both of them. So at twelve o'clock when she and Hedger got on the boat at Desbrosses Street, Caesar was lying on his pallet, with a bone.

Eden enjoyed the boat-ride. It was the first time she had been on the water, and she felt as if she were embarking for France. The light warm breeze and the plunge of the waves made her very wide awake, and she liked crowds of any kind. They went to the balcony of a big, noisy restaurant and had a shore dinner, with tall steins of beer. Hedger had got a big advance from his advertising firm

since he first lunched with Miss Bower ten days ago, and he was ready for anything.

After dinner they went to the tent behind the bathing beach, where the tops of two balloons bulged out over the canvas. A red-faced man in a linen suit stood in front of the tent, shouting in a hoarse voice and telling the people that if the crowd was good for five dollars more, a beautiful young woman would risk her life for their entertainment. Four little boys in dirty red uniforms ran about taking contributions in their pill-box hats. One of the balloons was bobbing up and down in its tether and people were shoving forward to get nearer the tent.

"Is it dangerous, as he pretends?" Eden asked.

"Molly says it's simple enough if nothing goes wrong with the balloon. Then it would be all over, I suppose."

"Wouldn't you like to go up with her?"

"I? Of course not. I'm not fond of taking foolish risks."

Eden sniffed. "I shouldn't think sensible risks would be very much fun."

Hedger did not answer, for just then every one began to shove the other way and shout, "Look out. There she goes!" and a band of six pieces commenced playing furiously.

As the balloon rose from its tent enclosure, they saw a girl in green tights standing in the basket, holding carelessly to one of the ropes with one hand and with the other waving to the spectators. A long rope trailed behind to keep the balloon from blowing out to sea.

As it soared, the figure in green tights in the basket diminished to a mere spot, and the balloon

itself, in the brilliant light, looked like a big silver-grey bat, with its wings folded. When it began to sink, the girl stepped through the hole in the basket to a trapeze that hung below, and gracefully descended through the air, holding to the rod with both hands, keeping her body taut and her feet close together. The crowd, which had grown very large by this time, cheered vociferously. The men took off their hats and waved, little boys shouted, and fat old women, shining with the heat and a beer-lunch, murmured admiring comments upon the balloonist's figure. "Beautiful legs, she has!"

"That's so," Hedger whispered. "Not many girls would look well in that position." Then, for some reason, he blushed a slow, dark, painful crimson.

The balloon descended slowly, a little way from the tent, and the red-faced man in the linen suit caught Molly Welch before her feet touched the ground, and pulled her to one side. The band struck up "Blue Bell" by way of welcome, and one of the sweaty pages ran forward and presented the balloonist with a large bouquet of artificial flowers. She smiled and thanked him, and ran back across the sand to the tent.

"Can't we go inside and see her?" Eden asked. "You can explain to the door man. I want to meet her." Edging forward, she herself addressed the man in the linen suit and slipped something from her purse into his hand.

They found Molly seated before a trunk that had a mirror in the lid and a "make-up" outfit spread upon the tray. She was wiping the cold cream and powder from her neck with a discarded chemise.

"Hello, Don," she said cordially. "Brought a friend?"

Eden liked her. She had an easy, friendly manner, and there was something boyish and devil-may-care about her.

"Yes, it's fun. I'm mad about it," she said in reply to Eden's questions. "I always want to let go, when I come down on the bar. You don't feel your weight at all, as you would on a stationary trapeze."

The big drum boomed outside, and the publicity man began shouting to newly arrived boatloads. Miss Welch took a last pull at her cigarette. "Now you'll have to get out, Don. I change for the next act. This time I go up in a black evening dress, and lose the skirt in the basket before I start down."

"Yes, go along," said Eden. "Wait for me outside the door. I'll stay and help her dress."

Hedger waited and waited, while women of every build bumped into him and begged his pardon, and the red pages ran about holding out their caps for coins, and the people ate and perspired and shifted parasols against the sun. When the band began to play a two-step, all the bathers ran up out of the surf to watch the ascent. The second balloon bumped and rose, and the crowd began shouting to the girl in a black evening dress who stood leaning against the ropes and smiling. "It's a new girl," they called. "It ain't the Countess this time. You're a peach, girlie!"

The balloonist acknowledged these compliments, bowing and looking down over the sea of upturned faces,—but Hedger was determined she should not see him, and he darted behind the tent-fly. He was suddenly dripping with cold sweat, his mouth was

full of the bitter taste of anger and his tongue felt stiff behind his teeth. Molly Welch, in a shirt-waist and a white tam-o'-shanter cap, slipped out from the tent under his arm and laughed up in his face. "She's a crazy one you brought along. She'll get what she wants!"

"Oh, I'll settle with you, all right!" Hedger brought out with difficulty.

"It's not my fault, Donnie. I couldn't do anything with her. She bought me off. What's the matter with you? Are you soft on her? She's safe enough. It's as easy as rolling off a log, if you keep cool." Molly Welch was rather excited herself, and she was chewing gum at a high speed as she stood beside him, looking up at the floating silver cone. "Now watch," she exclaimed suddenly. "She's coming down on the bar. I advised her to cut that out, but you see she does it first-rate. And she got rid of the skirt, too. Those black tights show off her legs very well. She keeps her feet together like I told her, and makes a good line along the back. See the light on those silver slippers,—that was a good idea I had. Come along to meet her. Don't be a grouch; she's done it fine!"

Molly tweaked his elbow, and then left him standing like a stump, while she ran down the beach with the crowd.

Though Hedger was sulking, his eye could not help seeing the low blue welter of the sea, the arrested bathers, standing in the surf, their arms and legs stained red by the dropping sun, all shading their eyes and gazing upward at the slowly falling silver star.

Molly Welch and the manager caught Eden under

the arms and lifted her aside, a red page dashed up with a bouquet, and the band struck up "Blue Bell." Eden laughed and bowed, took Molly's arm, and ran up the sand in her black tights and silver slippers, dodging the friendly old women, and the gallant sports who wanted to offer their homage on the spot.

When she emerged from the tent, dressed in her own clothes, that part of the beach was almost deserted. She stepped to her companion's side and said carelessly: "Hadn't we better try to catch this boat? I hope you're not sore at me. Really, it was lots of fun."

Hedger looked at his watch. "Yes, we have fifteen minutes to get to the boat," he said politely.

As they walked toward the pier, one of the pages ran up panting. "Lady, you're carrying off the bouquet," he said, aggrievedly.

Eden stopped and looked at the bunch of spotty cotton roses in her hand. "Of course. I want them for a souvenir. You gave them to me yourself."

"I give 'em to you for looks, but you can't take 'em away. They belong to the show."

"Oh, you always use the same bunch?"

"Sure we do. There ain't too much money in this business."

She laughed and tossed them back to him. "Why are you angry?" she asked Hedger. "I wouldn't have done it if I'd been with some fellows, but I thought you were the sort who wouldn't mind. Molly didn't for a minute think you would."

"What possessed you to do such a fool thing?" he asked roughly.

"I don't know. When I saw her coming down,

I wanted to try it. It looked exciting. Didn't I hold myself as well as she did?"

Hedger shrugged his shoulders, but in his heart he forgave her.

The return boat was not crowded, though the boats that passed them, going out, were packed to the rails. The sun was setting. Boys and girls sat on the long benches with their arms about each other, singing. Eden felt a strong wish to propitiate her companion, to be alone with him. She had been curiously wrought up by her balloon trip; it was a lark, but not very satisfying unless one came back to something after the flight. She wanted to be admired and adored. Though Eden said nothing, and sat with her arms limp on the rail in front of her, looking languidly at the rising silhouette of the city and the bright path of the sun, Hedger felt a strange drawing near to her. If he but brushed her white skirt with his knee, there was an instant communication between them, such as there had never been before. They did not talk at all, but when they went over the gangplank she took his arm and kept her shoulder close to his. He felt as if they were enveloped in a highly charged atmosphere, an invisible network of subtle, almost painful sensibility. They had somehow taken hold of each other.

An hour later, they were dining in the back garden of a little French hotel on Ninth Street, long since passed away. It was cool and leafy there, and the mosquitoes were not very numerous. A party of South Americans at another table were drinking champagne, and Eden murmured that she thought she would like some, if it were not too expensive. "Perhaps it will make me think I am in the balloon

again. That was a very nice feeling. You've forgiven me, haven't you?"

Hedger gave her a quick straight look from under his black eyebrows, and something went over her that was like a chill, except that it was warm and feathery. She drank most of the wine; her companion was indifferent to it. He was talking more to her tonight than he had ever done before. She asked him about a new picture she had seen in his room; a queer thing full of stiff, supplicating female figures. "It's Indian, isn't it?"

"Yes. I call it Rain Spirits, or maybe, Indian Rain. In the Southwest, where I've been a good deal, the Indian traditions make women have to do with the rain-fall. They were supposed to control it, somehow, and to be able to find springs, and make moisture come out of the earth. You see I'm trying to learn to paint what people think and feel; to get away from all that photographic stuff. When I look at you, I don't see what a camera would see, do I?"

"How can I tell?"

"Well, if I should paint you, I could make you understand what I see." For the second time that day Hedger crimsoned unexpectedly, and his eyes fell and steadily contemplated a dish of little radishes. "That particular picture I got from a story a Mexican priest told me; he said he found it in an old manuscript book in a monastery down there, written by some Spanish Missionary, who got his stories from the Aztecs. This one he called 'The Forty Lovers of the Queen,' and it was more or less about rain-making."

"Aren't you going to tell it to me?" Eden asked.

Hedger fumbled among the radishes. "I don't know if it's the proper kind of story to tell a girl."

She smiled; "Oh, forget about that! I've been balloon riding today. I like to hear you talk."

Her low voice was flattering. She had seemed like clay in his hands ever since they got on the boat to come home. He leaned back in his chair, forgot his food, and, looking at her intently, began to tell his story, the theme of which he somehow felt was dangerous tonight.

The tale began, he said, somewhere in Ancient Mexico, and concerned the daughter of a king. The birth of this Princess was preceded by unusual portents. Three times her mother dreamed that she was delivered of serpents, which betokened that the child she carried would have power with the rain gods. The serpent was the symbol of water. The Princess grew up dedicated to the gods, and wise men taught her the rain-making mysteries. She was with difficulty restrained from men and was guarded at all times, for it was the law of the Thunder that she be maiden until her marriage. In the years of her adolescence, rain was abundant with her people. The oldest man could not remember such fertility. When the Princess had counted eighteen summers, her father went to drive out a war party that harried his borders on the north and troubled his prosperity. The King destroyed the invaders and brought home many prisoners. Among the prisoners was a young chief, taller than any of his captors, of such strength and ferocity that the King's people came a day's journey to look at him. When the Princess beheld his great stature, and saw that his arms and breast were covered with the figures of wild animals, bitten

into the skin and coloured, she begged his life from her father. She desired that he should practise his art upon her, and prick upon her skin the signs of Rain and Lightning and Thunder, and stain the wounds with herb-juices, as they were upon his own body. For many days, upon the roof of the King's house, the Princess submitted herself to the bone needle, and the women with her marvelled at her fortitude. But the Princess was without shame before the Captive, and it came about that he threw from him his needles and his stains, and fell upon the Princess to violate her honour; and her women ran down from the roof screaming, to call the guard which stood at the gateway of the King's house, and none stayed to protect their mistress. When the guard came, the Captive was thrown into bonds, and he was gelded, and his tongue was torn out, and he was given for a slave to the Rain Princess.

The country of the Aztecs to the east was tormented by thirst, and their king, hearing much of the rain-making arts of the Princess, sent an embassy to her father, with presents and an offer of marriage. So the Princess went from her father to be the Queen of the Aztecs, and she took with her the Captive, who served her in everything with entire fidelity and slept upon a mat before her door.

The King gave his bride a fortress on the outskirts of the city, whither she retired to entreat the rain gods. This fortress was called the Queen's House, and on the night of the new moon the Queen came to it from the palace. But when the moon waxed and grew toward the round, because the god of Thunder had had his will of her, then the Queen returned to the King. Drouth abated in

the country and rain fell abundantly by reason of the Queen's power with the stars.

When the Queen went to her own house she took with her no servant but the Captive, and he slept outside her door and brought her food after she had fasted. The Queen had a jewel of great value, a torquoise that had fallen from the sun, and had the image of the sun upon it. And when she desired a young man whom she had seen in the army or among the slaves, she sent the Captive to him with the jewel, for a sign that he should come to her secretly at the Queen's House upon business concerning the welfare of all. And some, after she had talked with them, she sent away with rewards; and some she took into her chamber and kept them by her for one night or two. Afterward she called the Captive and bade him conduct the youth by the secret way he had come, underneath the chambers of the fortress. But for the going away of the Queen's lovers the Captive took out the bar that was beneath a stone in the floor of the passage, and put in its stead a rush-reed, and the youth stepped upon it and fell through into a cavern that was the bed of an underground river, and whatever was thrown into it was not seen again. In this service nor in any other did the Captive fail the Queen.

But when the Queen sent for the Captain of the Archers, she detained him four days in her chamber, calling often for food and wine, and was greatly content with him. On the fourth day she went to the Captive outside her door and said: "Tomorrow take this man up by the sure way, by which the King comes, and let him live."

In the Queen's door were arrows, purple and white. When she desired the King to come to her publicly, with his guard, she sent him a white arrow; but when she sent the purple, he came secretly, and covered himself with his mantle to be hidden from the stone gods at the gate. On the fifth night that the Queen was with her lover, the Captive took a purple arrow to the King, and the King came secretly and found them together. He killed the Captain with his own hand, but the Queen he brought to public trial. The Captive, when he was put to the question, told on his fingers forty men that he had let through the underground passage into the river. The Captive and the Queen were put to death by fire, both on the same day, and afterward there was scarcity of rain.

Eden Bower sat shivering a little as she listened. Hedger was not trying to please her, she thought, but to antagonize and frighten her by his brutal story. She had often told herself that his lean, big-boned lower jaw was like his bull-dog's, but tonight his face made Caesar's most savage and determined expression seem an affectation. Now she was looking at the man he really was. Nobody's eyes had ever defied her like this. They were searching her and seeing everything; all she had concealed from Livingston, and from the millionaire and his friends, and from the newspaper men. He was testing her, trying her out, and she was more ill at ease than she wished to show.

"That's quite a thrilling story," she said at last, rising and winding her scarf about her throat. "It must be getting late. Almost every one has gone."

They walked down the Avenue like people who have quarrelled, or who wish to get rid of each other. Hedger did not take her arm at the street crossings, and they did not linger in the Square. At her door he tried none of the old devices of the Livingston boys. He stood like a post, having forgotten to take off his hat, gave her a harsh, threatening glance, muttered "goodnight," and shut his own door noisily.

There was no question of sleep for Eden Bower. Her brain was working like a machine that would never stop. After she undressed, she tried to calm her nerves by smoking a cigarette, lying on the divan by the open window. But she grew wider and wider awake, combating the challenge that had flamed all evening in Hedger's eyes. The balloon had been one kind of excitement, the wine another; but the thing that had roused her, as a blow rouses a proud man, was the doubt, the contempt, the sneering hostility with which the painter had looked at her when he told his savage story. Crowds and balloons were all very well, she reflected, but woman's chief adventure is man. With a mind over active and a sense of life over strong, she wanted to walk across the roofs in the starlight, to sail over the sea and face at once a world of which she had never been afraid.

Hedger must be asleep; his dog had stopped sniffing under the double doors, Eden put on her wrapper and slippers and stole softly down the hall over the old carpet; one loose board creaked just as she reached the ladder. The trap-door was open, as always on hot nights. When she stepped out on the roof she drew a long breath and walked

across it, looking up at the sky. Her foot touched something soft; she heard a low growl, and on the instant Caesar's sharp little teeth caught her ankle and waited. His breath was like steam on her leg. Nobody had ever intruded upon his roof before, and he panted for the movement or the word that would let him spring his jaw. Instead, Hedger's hand seized his throat.

"Wait a minute. I'll settle with him," he said grimly. He dragged the dog toward the manhole and disappeared. When he came back, he found Eden standing over by the dark chimney, looking away in an offended attitude.

"I caned him unmercifully," he panted. "Of course you didn't hear anything; he never whines when I beat him. He didn't nip you, did he?"

"I don't know whether he broke the skin or not," she answered aggrievedly, still looking off into the west.

"If I were one of your friends in white pants, I'd strike a match to find whether you were hurt, though I know you are not, and then I'd see your ankle, wouldn't I?"

"I suppose so."

He shook his head and stood with his hands in the pockets of his old painting jacket. "I'm not up to such boy-tricks. If you want the place to yourself, I'll clear out. There are plenty of places where I can spend the night, what's left of it. But if you stay here and I stay here—" He shrugged his shoulders.

Eden did not stir, and she made no reply. Her head drooped slightly, as if she were considering. But the moment he put his arms about her they

began to talk, both at once, as people do in an opera. The instant avowal brought out a flood of trivial admissions. Hedger confessed his crime, was reproached and forgiven, and now Eden knew what it was in his look that she had found so disturbing of late.

Standing against the black chimney, with the sky behind and blue shadows before, they looked like one of Hedger's own paintings of that period; two figures, one white and one dark, and nothing whatever distinguishable about them but that they were male and female. The faces were lost, the contours blurred in shadow, but the figures were a man and a woman, and that was their whole concern and their mysterious beauty,—it was the rhythm in which they moved, at last, along the roof and down into the dark hole; he first, drawing her gently after him. She came down very slowly. The excitement and bravado and uncertainty of that long day and night seemed all at once to tell upon her. When his feet were on the carpet and he reached up to lift her down, she twined her arms about his neck as after a long separation, and turned her face to him, and her lips, with their perfume of youth and passion.

One Saturday afternoon Hedger was sitting in the window of Eden's music room. They had been watching the pigeons come wheeling over the roofs from their unknown feeding grounds.

"Why," said Eden suddenly, "don't we fix those big doors into your studio so they will open? Then, if I want you, I won't have to go through the hall. That illustrator is loafing about a good deal of late."

"I'll open them, if you wish. The bolt is on your side."

"Isn't there one on yours, too?"

"No. I believe a man lived there for years before I came in, and the nurse used to have these rooms herself. Naturally, the lock was on the lady's side."

Eden laughed and began to examine the bolt. "It's all stuck up with paint." Looking about, her eye lighted upon a bronze Buddah which was one of the nurse's treasures. Taking him by his head, she struck the bolt a blow with his squatting posteriors. The two doors creaked, sagged, and swung weakly inward a little way, as if they were too old for such escapades. Eden tossed the heavy idol into a stuffed chair. "That's better," she exclaimed exultantly. "So the bolts are always on the lady's side? What a lot society takes for granted!"

Hedger laughed, sprang up and caught her arms roughly. "Whoever takes you for granted— Did anybody, ever?"

"Everybody does. That's why I'm here. You are the only one who knows anything about me. Now I'll have to dress if we're going out for dinner."

He lingered, keeping his hold on her. "But I won't always be the only one, Eden Bower. I won't be the last."

"No, I suppose not," she said carelessly. "But what does that matter? You are the first."

As a long, despairing whine broke in the warm stillness, they drew apart. Caesar, lying on his bed in the dark corner, had lifted his head at this invasion of sunlight, and realized that the side of his room was broken open, and his whole world shat-

tered by change. There stood his master and this woman, laughing at him! The woman was pulling the long black hair of this mightiest of men, who bowed his head and permitted it.

VI

In time they quarrelled, of course, and about an abstraction,—as young people often do, as mature people almost never do. Eden came in late one afternoon. She had been with some of her musical friends to lunch at Burton Ives' studio, and she began telling Hedger about its splendours. He listened a moment and then drew down his brushes. "I know exactly what it's like," he said impatiently. "A very good department-store conception of a studio. It's one of the show places."

"Well, it's gorgeous, and he said I could bring you to see him. The boys tell me he's awfully kind about giving people a lift, and you might get something out of it."

Hedger started up and pushed his canvas out of the way. "What could I possibly get from Burton Ives? He's almost the worst painter in the world; the stupidest, I mean."

Eden was annoyed. Burton Ives had been very nice to her and had begged her to sit for him. "You must admit that he's a very successful one," she said coldly.

"Of course he is! Anybody can be successful who will do that sort of thing. I wouldn't paint his pictures for all the money in New York."

"Well, I saw a lot of them, and I think they are beautiful."

Hedger bowed stiffly.

"What's the use of being a great painter if nobody knows about you?" Eden went on persuasively. "Why don't you paint the kind of pictures people can understand, and then, after you're successful, do whatever you like?"

"As I look at it," said Hedger brusquely, "I am successful."

Eden glanced about. "Well, I don't see any evidences of it," she said, biting her lip. "He has a Japanese servant and a wine cellar, and keeps a riding horse."

Hedger melted a little. "My dear, I have the most expensive luxury in the world, and I am much more extravagant than Burton Ives, for I work to please nobody but myself."

"You mean you could make money and don't? That you don't try to get a public?"

"Exactly. A public only wants what has been done over and over. I'm painting for painters,—who haven't been born."

"What would you do if I brought Mr. Ives down here to see your things?"

"Well, for God's sake, don't! Before he left I'd probably tell him what I thought of him."

Eden rose. "I give you up. You know very well there's only one kind of success that's real."

"Yes, but it's not the kind you mean. So you've been thinking me a scrub painter, who needs a helping hand from some fashionable studio man? What the devil have you had anything to do with me for, then?"

"There's no use talking to you," said Eden, walking slowly toward the door. "I've been trying to pull

wires for you all afternoon, and this is what it comes to." She had expected that the tidings of a prospective call from the great man would be received very differently, and had been thinking as she came home in the stage how, as with a magic wand, she might gild Hedger's future, float him out of his dark hole on a tide of prosperity, see his name in the papers and his pictures in the windows on Fifth Avenue.

Hedger mechanically snapped the midsummer leash on Caesar's collar and they ran downstairs and hurried through Sullivan Street off toward the river. He wanted to be among rough, honest people, to get down where the big drays bumped over stone paving blocks and the men wore corduroy trousers and kept their shirts open at the neck. He stopped for a drink in one of the sagging bar-rooms on the water front. He had never in his life been so deeply wounded; he did not know he could be so hurt. He had told this girl all his secrets. On the roof, in these warm, heavy summer nights, with her hands locked in his, he had been able to explain all his misty ideas about an unborn art the world was waiting for; had been able to explain them better than he had ever done to himself. And she had looked away to the chattels of this uptown studio and coveted them for him! To her he was only an unsuccessful Burton Ives.

Then why, as he had put it to her, did she take up with him? Young, beautiful, talented as she was, why had she wasted herself on a scrub? Pity? Hardly; she wasn't sentimental. There was no explaining her. But in this passion that had seemed so fearless and so fated to be, his own position now looked to him ridiculous; a poor dauber without

money or fame,—it was her caprice to load him with favours. Hedger ground his teeth so loud that his dog, trotting beside him, heard him and looked up.

While they were having supper at the oyster-man's, he planned his escape. Whenever he saw her again, everything he had told her, that he should never have told any one, would come back to him; ideas he had never whispered even to the painter whom he worshipped and had gone all the way to France to see. To her they must seem his apology for not having horses and a valet, or merely the puerile boastfulness of a weak man. Yet if she slipped the bolt tonight and came through the doors and said, "Oh, weak man, I belong to you!" what could he do? That was the danger. He would catch the train out to Long Beach tonight, and tomorrow he would go on to the north end of Long Island, where an old friend of his had a summer studio among the sand dunes. He would stay until things came right in his mind. And she could find a smart painter, or take her punishment.

When he went home, Eden's room was dark; she was dining out somewhere. He threw his things into a hold-all he had carried about the world with him, strapped up some colours and canvases, and ran downstairs.

VII

Five days later Hedger was a restless passenger on a dirty, crowded Sunday train, coming back to town. Of course he saw now how unreasonable he had been in expecting a Huntington girl to know

anything about pictures; here was a whole continent full of people who knew nothing about pictures and he didn't hold it against them. What had such things to do with him and Eden Bower? When he lay out on the dunes, watching the moon come up out of the sea, it had seemed to him that there was no wonder in the world like the wonder of Eden Bower. He was going back to her because she was older than art, because she was the most overwhelming thing that had ever come into his life.

He had written her yesterday, begging her to be at home this evening, telling her that he was contrite, and wretched enough.

Now that he was on his way to her, his stronger feeling unaccountably changed to a mood that was playful and tender. He wanted to share everything with her, even the most trivial things. He wanted to tell her about the people on the train, coming back tired from their holiday with bunches of wilted flowers and dirty daisies; to tell her that the fish-man, to whom she had often sent him for lobsters, was among the passengers, disguised in a silk shirt and a spotted tie, and how his wife looked exactly like a fish, even to her eyes, on which cataracts were forming. He could tell her, too, that he hadn't as much as unstrapped his canvases,—that ought to convince her.

In those days passengers from Long Island came into New York by ferry. Hedger had to be quick about getting his dog out of the express car in order to catch the first boat. The East River, and the bridges, and the city to the west, were burning in the conflagration of the sunset; there was that great home-coming reach of evening in the air.

The car changes from Thirty-fourth Street were too many and too perplexing; for the first time in his life Hedger took a hansom cab for Washington Square. Caesar sat bolt upright on the worn leather cushion beside him, and they jogged off, looking down on the rest of the world.

It was twilight when they drove down lower Fifth Avenue into the Square, and through the Arch behind them were the two long rows of pale violet lights that used to bloom so beautifully against the grey stone and asphalt. Here and yonder about the Square hung globes that shed a radiance not unlike the blue mists of evening, emerging softly when daylight died, as the stars emerged in the thin blue sky. Under them the sharp shadows of the trees fell on the cracked pavement and the sleeping grass. The first stars and the first lights were growing silver against the gradual darkening, when Hedger paid his driver and went into the house,—which, thank God, was still there! On the hall table lay his letter of yesterday, unopened.

He went upstairs with every sort of fear and every sort of hope clutching at his heart; it was as if tigers were tearing him. Why was there no gas burning in the top hall? He found matches and the gas bracket. He knocked, but got no answer; nobody was there. Before his own door were exactly five bottles of milk, standing in a row. The milk-boy had taken spiteful pleasure in thus reminding him that he forgot to stop his order.

Hedger went down to the basement; it, too, was dark. The janitress was taking her evening airing on the basement steps. She sat waving a palm-leaf fan majestically, her dirty calico dress open at the

neck. She told him at once that there had been "changes." Miss Bower's room was to let again, and the piano would go tomorrow. Yes, she left yesterday, she sailed for Europe with friends from Chicago. They arrived on Friday, heralded by many telegrams. Very rich people they were said to be, though the man had refused to pay the nurse a month's rent in lieu of notice,—which would have been only right, as the young lady had agreed to take the rooms until October. Mrs. Foley had observed, too, that he didn't overpay her or Willy for their trouble, and a great deal of trouble they had been put to, certainly. Yes, the young lady was very pleasant, but the nurse said there were rings on the mahogany table where she had put tumblers and wine glasses. It was just as well she was gone. The Chicago man was uppish in his ways, but not much to look at. She supposed he had poor health, for there was nothing to him inside his clothes.

Hedger went slowly up the stairs—never had they seemed so long, or his legs so heavy. The upper floor was emptiness and silence. He unlocked his room, lit the gas, and opened the windows. When he went to put his coat in the closet, he found, hanging among his clothes, a pale, flesh-tinted dressing gown he had liked to see her wear, with a perfume—oh, a perfume that was still Eden Bower! He shut the door behind him and there, in the dark, for a moment he lost his manliness. It was when he held this garment to him that he found a letter in the pocket.

The note was written with a lead pencil, in haste: She was sorry that he was angry, but she still didn't know just what she had done. She had thought Mr. Ives would be useful to him; she guessed he was

too proud. She wanted awfully to see him again, but Fate came knocking at her door after he had left her. She believed in Fate. She would never forget him, and she knew he would become the greatest painter in the world. Now she must pack. She hoped he wouldn't mind her leaving the dressing gown: somehow, she could never wear it again.

After Hedger read this, standing under the gas, he went back into the closet and knelt down before the wall; the knot hole had been plugged up with a ball of wet paper,—the same blue note-paper on which her letter was written.

He was hard hit. Tonight he had to bear the loneliness of a whole lifetime. Knowing himself so well, he could hardly believe that such a thing had ever happened to him, that such a woman had lain happy and contented in his arms. And now it was over. He turned out the light and sat down on his painter's stool before the big window. Caesar, on the floor beside him, rested his head on his master's knee. We must leave Hedger thus, sitting in his tank with his dog, looking up at the stars.

COMING, APHRODITE! This legend, in electric lights over the Lexington Opera House, had long announced the return of Eden Bower to New York after years of spectacular success in Paris. She came at last, under the management of an American Opera Company, but bringing her own *chef d'orchestre*.

One bright December afternoon Eden Bower was going down Fifth Avenue in her car, on the way to her broker, in William Street. Her thoughts were entirely upon stocks,—Cerro de Pasco, and how much she should buy of it,—when she suddenly

looked up and realized that she was skirting Washington Square. She had not seen the place since she rolled out of it in an old-fashioned four-wheeler to seek her fortune, eighteen years ago.

"Arrêtez, Alphonse. Attendez moi," she called, and opened the door before he could reach it. The children who were streaking over the asphalt on roller skates saw a lady in a long fur coat, and short, high-heeled shoes, alight from a French car and pace slowly about the Square, holding her muff to her chin. This spot, at least, had changed very little, she reflected; the same trees, the same fountain, the white arch, and over yonder, Garibaldi, drawing the sword for freedom. There, just opposite her, was the old red brick house.

"Yes, that is the place," she was thinking. "I can smell the carpets now, and the dog,—what was his name? That grubby bathroom at the end of the hall, and that dreadful Hedger—still, there was something about him, you know—" She glanced up and blinked against the sun. From somewhere in the crowded quarter south of the Square a flock of pigeons rose, wheeling quickly upward into the brilliant blue sky. She threw back her head, pressed her muff closer to her chin, and watched them with a smile of amazement and delight. So they still rose, out of all that dirt and noise and squalor, fleet and silvery, just as they used to rise that summer when she was twenty and went up in a balloon on Coney Island!

Alphonse opened the door and tucked her robes about her. All the way down town her mind wandered from Cerro de Pasco, and she kept smiling and looking up at the sky.

When she had finished her business with the broker,

she asked him to look in the telephone book for the address of M. Gaston Jules, the picture dealer, and slipped the paper on which he wrote it into her glove. It was five o'clock when she reached the French Galleries, as they were called. On entering she gave the attendant her card, asking him to take it to M. Jules. The dealer appeared very promptly and begged her to come into his private office, where he pushed a great chair toward his desk for her and signalled his secretary to leave the room.

"How good your lighting is in here," she observed, glancing about. "I met you at Simon's studio, didn't I? Oh, no! I never forget anybody who interests me." She threw her muff on his writing table and sank into the deep chair. "I have come to you for some information that's not in my line. Do you know anything about an American painter named Hedger?"

He took the seat opposite her. "Don Hedger? But, certainly! There are some very interesting things of his in an exhibition at V——'s. If you would care to—"

She held up her hand. "No, no. I've no time to go to exhibitions. Is he a man of any importance?"

"Certainly. He is one of the first men among the moderns. That is to say, among the very moderns. He is always coming up with something different. He often exhibits in Paris, you must have seen—"

"No, I tell you I don't go to exhibitions. Has he had great success? That is what I want to know."

M. Jules pulled at his short grey moustache. "But, Madame, there are many kinds of success," he began cautiously.

Madame gave a dry langh. "Yes, so he used to

say. We once quarrelled on that issue. And how would you define his particular kind?"

M. Jules grew thoughtful. "He is a great name with all the young men, and he is decidedly an influence in art. But one can't definitely place a man who is original, erratic, and who is changing all the time."

She cut him short. "Is he much talked about at home? In Paris, I mean? Thanks. That's all I want to know." She rose and began buttoning her coat. "One doesn't like to have been an utter fool, even at twenty."

"Mais, non!" M. Jules handed her her muff with a quick, sympathetic glance. He followed her out through the carpeted show-room, now closed to the public and draped in cheesecloth, and put her into her car with words appreciative of the honour she had done him in calling.

Leaning back in the cushions, Eden Bower closed her eyes, and her face, as the street lamps flashed their ugly orange light upon it, became hard and settled, like a plaster cast; so a sail, that has been filled by a strong breeze, behaves when the wind suddenly dies. Tomorrow night the wind would blow again, and this mask would be the golden face of Aphrodite. But a "big" career takes its toll, even with the best of luck.

THE OPAL STRING

By Charles Saxby

It would be hard to determine just what started that affair of Nonor Bel-Sidis, down in New Orleans of old.

Perhaps it was the Mexican monk, his robe flapping about him like a flag of tragedy; or the game; or the string of opals; or the moon, like a golden lamp above that city of the swamps.

Then, again, it might have been just Dominick O'Mara himself, as he stood there on the levee—a slender, tawny sort of fellow, very trim in ruffled shirt bosom and reddish curls, with white trousers strapped under lacquered boots.

It was spring too, deep spring in Louisiana. Easter's high festival had just passed and the oleander trees were as clouds of pink and red. The river still held a chill in its olive flood, but out in Attakapas the prairies were knee-deep in grass, the bayous falsely blue with floating lilies. And Dominick was a scant twenty-six, his heart soft though stubborn, his temper always ready to blaze.

Yet his outward effect was one of coolness, an engaging sort of insolence as of one who had had to cut his way through the world by his own edge. It showed in his glance, in the curl of his lip, and

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in his hands, white, carefully tended, steady with cards or pistol and open with money, even though they had none—hands to which horses and dogs came to be stroked, while women—

But that was another tale. A strange tale too, as those about a man and a woman are apt to be. Some of it was already told, but the end was not yet in sight.

He had traveled much since, as the youngest of five wild sons of an Irish squireen, he had been pushed out from his home beside the Shannon. It is a far cry from the hills of County Clare to the half-tropic swamps through which the Mississippi pours to the Gulf. But the wheel of things, always throwing him out toward its edge where it revolves most swiftly, had now cast him up in this New Orleans of the forties, as much a coast of chance as ever the world had to offer.

It was down from the north that he had come, in one of those great, frail river packets ranked behind him at the levee. Heads turned to look at him as he landed, for rumors of him were already abroad—rumors of a game and a monk; of a game which had brought men pressing about the cabin doorway; of a monk who had flung himself to rash accounting with Providence.

Three men had sat with Dominick in that game: a Creole planter, a lank Kentuckian and a man from Texas who sat wide and bleak as one of his own buttes. All night they sat, the pile of chips mounting higher on the green cloth, while from the hurricane deck overhead came a sound of footsteps—the monk's footsteps those, as Dominick knew, disordered, per-

sistent, coming in horrid reiteration as of one trying to flee from himself. He could picture the fellow, a saturnine rack of bones, something like a picked crow under his black robe, his eyes as two red peep-holes into some private hell.

"I raise one hunder'," said the planter, pushing forward a scarlet chip.

Dominick dragged his mind back to his cards. Plague take that monk for coming so between him and the business of the game! He could almost hear the creature again, praying in the darkness:

"Domine, exaudi . . . clamor meus . . ."

Then a pounding of fists on a hollow chest and a choked cry.

"Am I one of the damned?"

But now it was morning, the yellow reek of the lamp paling in the dawn, passengers watching from the doorway, a Negro bringing coffee, his eyes round as dollars.

"Raise you a thousand more," barked the Texan, and the coffeepot rattled in the darky's hands.

It was up to Dominick now, and the whole cabin waited the words lurking behind his lips.

If only he could think, instead of listening so to those footsteps overhead. Let the fool be damned; what business was it of his? Then came a trampling confusion up above, a cry of hideous despair and something black hurtling down to the water like a shot buzzard.

Like some marionette jerked upward by unseen wires, Dominick rose. That was how he felt just then. It was useless to argue, to ask what affair was it of his? Was he, then, God, to pluck men from

damnation? That invisible pull upon him was beyond self-counsel, tugging irresistibly at his muscles.

"If you will excuse me a while—"

That was his own voice, and he was already laying his cards face downward on the table.

"—I think it's needed I am."

Three faces nodded inscrutably above a green cloth. Then he was at the rail, flinging off coat and shoes, diving carefully aft of the thrashing side wheel. He had caught a glimpse of an upturned face ghastly in the churning wake, of two bony hands clutching impotently up at nothing.

Half an hour later, with dripping clothes, Dominick reëntered the cabin where the three devotees of chance still sat in unmoved guard over cards and chips.

"Your pardon, gentlemen—where do we stand?"

"There's three thousand in the pot and it'll cost you eleven hundred to stay in," the Texan said.

Dominick's face paled under his wet hair. All he had in the world lay upon that table. One hand sought a pocket, feeling at a string of beads which yellow fingers had just thrust upon him—beads which he had accepted mainly to escape those abhorrent pawings of gratitude: oval beads, strung in tarnished silver, large as pecans, glowing like many-colored fires cased in globules of milk, and a dangling piece from which some finishing pendant had been torn. There was something almost sinister in their beauty —red, green and hot blues, veiled in milky innocence, but with potency in their flash!

Opals—that meant luck of some kind at least, whether good or bad the next few moments would show. He pushed forward his last stack of chips.

"I'll see it and raise it five hundred more."

The Creole gasped and cast down his cards; the Kentuckian seemed to crumble. Like animation through some stone idol, a hint of gambler's superstition swept the Texan.

"Did you get that fellow out?" he rasped.

"I did."

"Was it that Mexican monk?"

"It was."

With a blue oath the Texan threw his cards upon the table.

"A suicide and a priest; you can't beat that! I cave."

All eyes turned to the cards hidden in Dominick's hand, wondering as to their secret. With a slow smile he crumpled them in his wet fingers and flung them through the door out into the yellow river.

So much for that. The opals had brought him luck, and this New Orleans was promising—a passionate, pride-bound city, half mad with the tide of wealth poured down by the great river; a city of destiny gilded by romance, her charm almost that of a woman, and her caprice as well; an insolent city, stalked by blue fever wraiths that stole almost visibly in from swamp and bayou. Half queen, half slut, trailing rich robes in the mud; her commerce, her great churches, even the white purity of her ladies, all alike supported by a traffic in cringing human flesh. A vital town in a vital time, unhacked at by any axes of uplift or reform! There were prospects of adventure on every side, and Dominick was a good prospector.

He leaned from his balcony in a small hotel back behind the bulk of the cathedral. There were gay

groups on galleries of lacy ironwork, bananas drooping green fronds, noise and lights in streets still busy. And over all was that maddening moon and half-tropic enchantment.

There was singing in the next room; its long windows were yellow with light. From them to the corresponding balcony a figure drifted.

A little figure, gayly smiling, bobbing blond curls, her slimness rising like some pretty calyx from spread pink petals of crinoline! A carol of song, throatily liquid, a flash of blue eyes which seemed to have seen much and to be amused thereat! They appraised Dominick's leaning length, then the half-elfin face, pale with powder, crinkled into a grimace of mock modesty above a fan.

"Oh, la! A strange man; how sho-o-ocking!"

"And since when have fairies been afraid of mere men?" Dominick smiled.

That brought a twinkle, an impudent kick of a sandaled foot from under the crinoline's hem. Then came speech, like a tinkling torrent.

"What are you doing there all by yourself? Poor dear—did she jilt you? I can't believe that, though; no woman would. Why do you look so lonely? You won't think any the worse of me for speaking to you, will you? Isn't this a heavenly night, but oh, lud, what a pig of a town! They can't appreciate art here, my dear. Would you believe it? Hardly a corporal's guard in the theatre and old Caspar shedding real tears! You look as if you belonged with us; come along over. I'm Nonor Bel-Sidis. Who are you? But it doesn't matter; I am going to call you Cupid, anyway. Poor Rollo will be black as thunder when

he sees you, but that doesn't matter either. Isn't it lovely that nothing really matters? Come along, Cupid—"

That balcony plastered to the moonlit wall might have been some stage scene set up against the radiance of the night. She herself was like some moth of the footlights—a pink and golden moth, fluttering at the moon. Above all, she was obviously, utterly feminine. That was enough, and Dominick went by the simple process of leaping from the rail of one balcony to the other, heedless of the thirty-foot drop below.

Nonor clapped her hands at that.

"Ods duds! What an entrance! Can you sing? You should be in our company, Cupid. I tell Caspar we'll never be a success so long as he tries to sing my lovers—come in—"

Seizing his coat tails, she dragged him backward into the room, shrieking melodious delight.

"Look, my dears, see what I found—he jumped to my balcony. Caspar, you must work it into our next opera—but he must be the hero."

She whirled Dominick about, presenting him like some newly enchanting toy.

"His name is Cupid, and I've fallen completely in love with him."

Dominick knew the company into which he had leaped. The look of the room would have told him that. Apparently it was the Bel-Sidis bedroom, but no one seemed to mind. Great hair trunks spilled contents of soiled gayety, and the bed was heaped with the same. On the bureau a bottle of champagne stood among silver toilet articles and an overturned

saucer of rouge. From chair backs hung garments of lacy intimacy, all rather torn.

There was a fat little man, with a pale green skin and eyes like dead jet, who seemed to be this Caspar of whom she spoke. An imposing woman, curtained with purple satin, sat on a trunk as if it had been a stage throne and nodded a headdress of feathers. In the corner, slim and straight as some black and white ramrod, stood a young fellow of about Dominick's own age. He was evidently a Creole; sallow, lean, arrogant, with fine linen and much lank black hair.

"This is Madame Strobelli, the contralto," Nonor chirped on, indicating the woman on the trunk. "Give him your chest note, Strobby dear—wo-o-o-oh—like that," she mocked, in hollow depths. "And that's Rollo in the corner there—isn't he precious? Now you know everybody. Give him some wine, Caspar."

A wandering troupe, probably fallen on evil days, as these singing fly-by-nights always did. Dominick had met their sort before, the same the world over—will-o'-the-wisps, perpetually getting mired in the swamps over which they twinkled. A glass of sticky champagne was thrust into his hand, while the purple woman ogled from beneath her feathers. Caspar breathed stale whisky fumes at him; Nonor fluted in shrill mirth. It was only that Creole chap who was taking it at all seriously. And the only danger with people like these was to be serious about them.

"Miss Bel-Sidis—the finest Arline in this new opera, 'The Bohemian Girl'; the most enchanting of 'Preciosas' too," Caspar droned in his ear. "And, by gad, sir, not house enough to pay even the lights. A

conspiracy, that's what—a jealous professional cabal to crush her exquisite art!"

With his indignation he was almost convincing, in spite of his dingy linen and glass diamonds. Then the contralto, nodding her plumes and booming her chest note:

"I, Strobelli, have appeared at Covent Garden. I sang the page in 'Les Huguenots'!"

"Yes, sweetness, but it wasn't the title page," grimaced Nonor.

From the wall the young Creole bent severely, a trifle lantern-jawed under his black brows, his gaze consciously burning as it fastened on Nonor.

"I feel mos' deep' the insult which my city has offer' to Mademoiselle Bel-Sidis."

Dominick shot an appraising glance. There was something about that fellow; a bit ridiculous perhaps, but something real. The one thing which men always know is the one thing which women never, never know—and that is other men. There came a subtle change in his own manner as he spoke:

"Pardon me, my presentation was perhaps informal; I am Dominick O'Mara."

"And I am Roland Aguirre the Third."

With the announcement of his name the Creole seemed to wipe the other off his mind. The insult brought the quick blood pricking under Dominick's skin, yet he could understand the reason for it.

Roland Aguirre; he had heard that name even as far north as Memphis—the Aguirres of Belle-Source plantation; of Anse Picayune and its leagues of Opelousas prairie; of—of a considerable portion of all Louisiana, it appeared. Aguirre the Third, with hundreds of slaves, sailing his own sugar ships to

France, holding the keys of New Orleans in his pocket! And they met here in this tawdry room of a tawdry little singer.

"I am ashame'," Aguirre was going on, to Caspar and Strobelli, pointedly ignoring the newcomer. "All La Luziane should be at the feet of such art as Mademoiselle Bel-Sidis display'."

Then came a burst of Nonor's shrill laughter as she danced up to him on restless feet.

"Sweetie—ain't he perfect? But we are rotten, and we know it."

She lifted her voice, chirping and trilling like some slightly hoarse canary:

I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls
With a backer so rich and so ga-a-ay.

She stopped with a shrug, another of those irresistible chuckles.

"Then I woke up, my dears, and found that my feet were out at the window—no wonder they thought the floor was cold."

From beneath her crinoline her crisscross sandal pressed Dominick's instep. At the same moment her fingers brushed those of Roland Aguirre. An eerie little thing, she seemed, with her whitened face, her blue glances and impish grins; rather haunted beneath her gayety too; something like an anxious nightingale trying to stave off the frightening day by constant fluttering. From the wall, to which his back seemed grown, Roland Aguirre's gaze followed her with a perpetual smolder of humorless passion.

"The hotel is going to attach Miss Bel-Sidis' trunks in the morning," Caspar whispered to Dominick.

That was a hint, one which Dominick had been anticipating. He would probably heed it later on, for after all what was he himself but one of these same children of chance?

"You should go to California," he announced. "All the world is going there for gold."

California! Instantly they were intrigued. Their voices rose in bubbles of hope, glittering with all the colors of distance and romance. California—where one picked up gold in the streets—the first theatrical company in that land of sudden wealth. Nonor's shrillness rose above the rest.

"O-oh—gold! Those dear miners, all in their red shirts, just flinging it to me on the stage in handfuls!"

She stooped, scooping up imaginary treasure with hands scarcely large enough to hold a double eagle. The contralto trumpeted a note of scorn.

"I, Strobelli, go west to sing to painted Indians!"

Nonor turned on her with a shrug that held almost pathos under its derision.

"Poof, Strobby; what are we but a pack of painted Indians ourselves, whooping about the world? Ah, that lovely California—when shall we go?"

"There's a ship sailing in three days," Caspar put in.

"Three days!" Nonor shrieked. "I can never be ready! I must have oceans of new dresses."

Then Roland Aguirre struck a different note.

"But Mademoiselle Bel-Sidis forget—"

Instantly Nonor was before him, rubbing the powder from her cheek against his sleeves.

"Why, bless his heart, it's Rollo. Are you still there, dumpkins? But you must come to California

with us. We couldn't go without you, Rolly-boy. You'll have to pay our passages, of course. But you shall be the manager and make heaps and heaps of money and growl like managers always do—Old Caspar there will show you how. He knows, bless him."

"An Aguirre never leave' La Luziane," Roland haughtily returned.

"I had begun to suspect that," said Dominick.

The Creole's eyes flashed a tremendous ignoring of this person from without the pale of his sacred New Orleans. The atmosphere thickened, and Strobelli hastened to intervene, with a simpering flutter of her towering feathers.

"Do they not leave it even for dear Paris?"

"We are not interest' in those remote place'."

"Isn't he the dear old prize packet?" chirped Nonor, but Aguirre was not to be lightly appeased.

"It is impossib' that any country should be mo' rich than La Luziane."

The fellow was getting on Dominick's nerves, glooming there like the Great Khan himself. He could feel his temper ruffling inside him like some young gamecock. With deliberate impudence he drew from his pocket the monk's string of opals. "And can one pick up jewels like these from the mud of Louisiana?" he asked.

He dangled them until they glittered in the lamplight like pendent fires. A rosary, it might once have been, one from which the cross had been torn. It was almost threatening with its veiled flashes, as if Mars and Sirius shone through the Milky Way. Yet there was a fascination about it too; balefully irresistible.

Like some kitten after a swinging ball, Nonor sprung on tiptoe, reaching little hands in frank greed.

"Cupid—I knew I loved you! Oh, lud, let me wear it—just a minute—but you'll never, never get it back."

A strange contrast, those jewels shining crude wealth in that hopeless room, and the half child, half woman, who, for all her grace, more matched the room than the gems for which she reached!

There was a moment of silence, then two men speaking at once.

"Mademoiselle—"

"Nonor—"

The first was Aguirre, actually detaching himself from the wall. The other was Caspar, in cracking warning; and it was that second one whom Nonor heeded.

"Ods duds—if you are going to growl! He doesn't think any the worse of me for it; do you, Cupid?"

"Mademoiselle forget that—" began Aguirre, but instantly she had danced up to him.

"Bless it—I'll never forget *you*, Rollo-boy, not so long as I live."

She smiled, with a gay pirouette, another pat of her tiny hands upon Aguirre's wrist. Strange hands, every motion betraying experience, yet as unfeeling as those of a doll! Something of her spirit had gone at that crack of Caspar's voice. She was more like some trained thing performing its tricks at a master's bidding. A long glance passed between her and the manager as if she sought orders. He was pouring more champagne, achieving quite a manner behind his gaudy, spotted waistcoat.

"Wonderful opals, sir, but unlucky for a prima donna. I could not permit Miss Bel-Sidis to touch them—some wine, ladies?"

"Now, if Mr. Aguirre will grant me a few moments," he went on ingratiatingly, "and if the ladies will excuse us—business, ladies, business," he bowed in explanation, with a gallant flash of glass studs, "too dull for pretty ears. And you, sir," he bowed to Dominick, "I can safely leave you in the hands of the ladies until our return."

He had the stage art of effecting a clearance; his suave way prevailed and Aguirre was swept before him through the door. It had hardly closed behind them when Strobelli lifted herself from her trunk throne. There came a clutch of drama at her opulent bosom.

"Nonor, my pet—I fear it is a touch of the vapors."

Instantly Nonor was at her side, and the two clung with operatic sweetness.

"Oh, lud, Strobby dear," Nonor cried, fanning the other violently. "My smelling salts—or some vinegar on a handkerchief—but we haven't any—"

"No, no, I will repose a while," the contralto panted. "My poor heart—alas, to be so sensitive!"

She turned to Dominick, her chest note in evidence, her crinoline swaying with emotion.

"I ask your pardon, sir; I fear I must retire."

She swept a curtsy, then moved to the door, so like a whole procession in herself that Dominick almost timed her as she passed him. A final flutter of purple flounces, then the door closed.

It was strange how the mere showing of these opals had changed things. He had waved them in

the air, and before their magic three people had promptly disappeared.

"Oh, la—I am alone with you! How shocking!" giggled Nonor, covering her face with her hands.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to retire?" Dominick suggested.

There came a rippling chuckle, a blue gaze from between spreading fingers.

"You won't think any the worse of me for this?"

Dominick glanced about the room, noting the faded lambrequins, the heaps of soiled finery, the odor of sickly sweet champagne—not the first such room that he had seen. An old, old game was being played there, and he smiled, as he waited the next move.

Nonor caught the edge in that smile, and her hands fell from her face.

"Yes—please go," she said.

With the dropping of those hands her gayety had fallen too. She looked haunted under her powder, like some over-wise child frightened at realities breaking in upon its play. Dismissal was the last thing that Dominick had expected, and it brought an instant determination to remain.

"It's not really wanting me to go that you are," he declared.

His smile had taken an upward slant, a hint of whimsy like a sun ray dancing across one of his own Irish hillsides. Even as mercury, her spirits wavered up to its warmth.

"I—I don't know what I want, except that—that—"

"You want to be gay," he finished for her.

She came nearer, holding out hands that were an appeal in themselves.

"Oh, Cupid, how did you know that?"

"Because I know you. Where you were born, I can't say, nor what kind of a mother it was who brought you into the world. But wherever it may have been I'll swear it was the Little People who whispered over your cradle. And something of themselves they left in you. To be gay, always, that is what you want?" he laughed. "And so—"

His arm went about her. Humming a tune, he swept her across the floor in that just invented daring dance, the polka. At the window he thrust aside the green-slatted sun shutters, and it was only the balcony rail that stopped their progress.

"Oh, Cupid, you *are* nice," Nonor sighed.

Out there on the balcony it was all different again, with the moonlight lying bluely on yellow walls: flitting fireflies down below; the scent of orange bloom stealing up on the reek from green-slimed gutters; Negro voices lifted in plaintive song.

"Is this what you want?" Dominick asked.

Nonor leaned over the rail, spreading tiny fingers to the night.

"Yes, this, all of it, but with—oh, with something left out. Something out there—always just outside there—which frightens me, and I can never, never laugh it quite away."

She turned to him, rubbing her cheek against his arm.

"You understand me, don't you, Cupid, dear?"

"You want to be kept always safe."

"That's it," she sighed in content. "Of course I must have my dear theatre—always packed, with the people throwing roses at me. And I want to love; just a little, not so much that it hurts—just the way

I love you now. I could love everybody like that, if they would only let me. But they always seem to want something more. I even love old Caspar, except when he makes me do horrid things to people—things that frighten me—"

"Such as trying to get my opals," Dominick laughed, and she clapped her hands in relief.

"I knew that you knew. But, oh, you won't be horrid, will you? Sometimes they fight, and that frightens me, and once a man cursed me." She hid her face against his sleeve. "Why can't I have what I want, Cupid? It is so little I ask."

The trouble was that the world would not be content with what she had, but demanded of her that which she could never give. There came an impulse to take her up and away, off to some place where that demand could be shut out.

He found himself speaking it.

"—all roses and sunshine, and great lilies on deep blue ponds—"

Instantly she caught his fancy, drifting with him on its tide, their voices like a duet.

"And a swan, a big white swan, among the lilies."

"A swan," he agreed, "and to love—a little—not too much—and be always safe—"

"And always, always gay?"

"Always; just to sing and dance and tease Cupid."

"Should I grow old there, old and wrinkled and ugly?"

"Never; nobody grows old there."

Almost he believed it. They could play at it, at least; and she would ask so little, even less than she gave.

"And dresses?" she sighed. "And something bright and sparkling to wear?"

"How would these do?" he asked.

Drawing the opals from his pocket, he flung them about her neck. It was only a play; in half an hour she would be enamored of something else. And if not, why, the opals had come easily enough. Part of that half-told tale of Dominick and women was that he could refuse them nothing.

"I must have a kiss for them," he bargained, and she gurgled delight.

"A kiss—a million, Cupid dear; they cost nothing."

He knew that as he felt them, passionless, light as thistledown, brushing his lips like painted laughter. Her arms were about his neck as she reached on tiptoe for his lips. Then they tore apart at a voice from the window.

"Nonor!"

Caspar, of course, Dominick thought; probably he had been watching and waiting for just this moment. Well, he would settle him. But as he turned he saw it was Aguirre standing there, looking out at them in a black flame, and comedy became drama with his presence.

"Why, bless its heart, it's Rollo-boy," Nonor shrilled.

Aguirre brushed that aside, and Dominick caught a hint of danger as the other advanced a step.

"M'sieur, I find your presence mos' offensive."

"And is it for M'sieur Aguirre to say who shall visit Miss Bel-Sidis?" Dominick flared.

Back in the room Caspar had suddenly arrived, breathless, green with chagrin, and the surprise in his face was proof that this scene with Aguirre was

none of his planning. He would have spoken, but the Creole was before him.

"It is for me to say who shall give Mademoiselle Bel-Sidis the jewel', for this aft'noon she has promise' to be my wife."

A gasp from the room. That was Caspar, on his face the look of one who sees a whale escape while he has been angling for a mackerel. Still radiant with the opals, Nonor tinkled mirth.

"Ods duds, so I did. I had forgotten it. But of course I'll marry you, Rolly dear—some day. And we'll all go to California and pick up gold—but Cupid here must come too, and then—then—"

Her voice died slowly out under Aguirre's brooding stare. A butterfly overtaken by a storm she looked at that instant.

It was tragedy now, the sordid little tragedy of a comedienne flinging her smiles to a gloomy audience. Her laughter rang bravely, for it was all she had to give. In a last effort she pirouetted between them, dropping a kiss on the chin of each young man, never dreaming the gash she was cutting in the Creole.

Pallid with anger, Aguirre stepped to Dominick.

"M'sieur, this is of your work. What I have to say mus' not be said befo' ladies; but firs'—"

Stripping the opals from Nonor's neck, he held them out to Dominick.

"Now, m'sieur; if you will meet me downstair' and bring witness—"

"I am at your service," Dominick bowed.

That jump to Nonor's balcony had truly been a leap in the dark, he thought—another turn in the game of chance, and the bony hands of the monk

still dealing the cards. Caspar came violently forward.

"Boys, for God's sake, not a duel."

"A duel—!"

That was Nonor, whiter than her powder with the coming of this seriousness which she so dreaded. That lurking thing which she had felt out in the pulsing night was upon her now, spiking her batteries of unavailing mirth.

"A duel—oh, God—no—no—no—"

She rushed from them, tearing herself from Caspar's attempted grasp, through the room and out into the corridor, filling it with shrill shrieks.

"The fat's in the fire now," Caspar said.

Dominick nodded silently. The whole hotel would be aware of the challenge in that room, and there was now no way for either of them to draw back.

The dawn broke grayly over New Orleans, chill with swamp mists dripping from the live oaks on the savanna back of the slaughterhouses.

All night Dominick had written, disposing of affairs. That same Texan of the steamboat was to be his second. He waited now, rocklike, thin-lipped, under a jutting nose, as once more the morning paled the lamp.

"Time we went, lad; the hack is waiting," said the Texan.

Dominick dashed his signature across the last document; then rose, pulling on his gloves, muffling himself in a silver-buttoned cape of blue broadcloth.

"You filed the pins?" he asked, nodding toward the pistol case.

"I did. They were hair-trigger before, but they are breath-trigger now."

"It's thought-trigger that I'm wanting," Dominick said, and the other's hand came down upon his shoulder.

"They are near that. Lad, what are you aiming at?"

"It is Aguirre who'll be aiming at me," Dominick responded, and there came the flash of a grin across his face.

"A proud piece that, and pride is always quick on the trigger."

That savanna was a dreary place, its wilderness spotted with the dubious débris of an advancing city: great oaks veiled in moss that dropped like funeral hangings; saw palmettoes along a ditch on which floated the swollen carcass of a dog. Something of that gray mist had crept inside Dominick—two young fools, he thought, facing death at each other's hands for the sake of some face powder and yellow ringlets.

There was Aguirre, in dark trousers and ruffled shirt, his hair more lank than ever in the dampness, his eyes like those of some angry bear cub. Nothing short of a bucket of blood could appease that raw romanticism. Back of him were his seconds, half a dozen of the most important men in the city, tremendous in shaped overcoats and great bell-crowned hats—cold eyes, glacial courtesy, all the pompous fuss of such an occasion; and Aguirre standing like a ramrod, with a twitching muscle on his lean jaw. The eyes of all New Orleans were in that group behind him. In two hours Sazerax's, the St. Louis Hotel, the corridors of the Custom House, and the Esplanade drawing-room alike would be buzzing with the details of this meeting. That muscle on his jaw was twitching, not with fear, but with

the fear that some involuntary gesture might be construed as fear.

There was the rattle of a carriage hidden by the mist, horses' hoofs sucking at the muddy road. The Texan approached Dominick, thrusting a pistol into his hand.

"Your terms are accepted, lad. Back to back, then each walk fifteen paces to our count, then turn and fire—one shot each."

Dominick threw off his hat and cape. There was a last flash of scorn from Aguirre, one lock of his lank hair standing up like a parrot's crest. He was quite magnificent, and quite conscious of it. Dominick was holding himself slackly, his mind a deliberate blank. Then came the drag, drag of those counted paces, with that sound of wheels drawing ever nearer.

"— thirteen — fourteen — fifteen — *Turn* — Good God—"

Aguirre had fired even while Dominick was still sideways in his turning. That thought-trigger and twitching muscle had betrayed the Creole's fingers. Dominick felt a sting in his hip and knew himself hit. A sickening thought, and the pit of his stomach seemed to flop over! But he must not fall nor crumple. There was no pain as yet, and Aguirre had spent his one shot. He stood there now, the smoke clearing from before him, his face yellowing as he saw himself helpless before his adversary's weapon.

The important group was frozen to silence; the Texan might have been hacked from granite as Dominick aimed. His face was marble white, the lips curved into a faint smile as he began at the Creole's

feet, then swept slowly upward, the muzzle halting at the level of the other's breast—of his throat—

Wet grass, a dead dog floating paws upward among the palmetto stalks! Arrogant personages making faint noises; a hack looming through the mist behind galloping horses! And that wicked black muzzle now pointing straight to the spot between Aguirre's eyes! The slightest tremor of that trigger finger would send the shot crashing through the Creole's brain.

Perhaps that would scare out those rats of pride.

Then a swift lift, a flash and that upstanding tuft on Aguirre's head sprang from its roots, showering dark hairs upon his cravat.

"The neatest trim I ever saw," the Texan roared. "And I thought it was death I saw in your eyes. Are you hit, lad?"

Dominick felt under his waistband; his hip was stinging now, and he felt limp and sick. But there was no warm wetness there, no stain upon his hand, and yet the torn cloth of his pocket showed the bullet's passage. Something hard, like a heap of round pebbles—he understood it now. He had dropped the monk's rosary in his pocket, and they had turned Aguirre's shot aside from his flesh. That oddly mixed luck of the opals still held.

He glanced at Aguirre, wondering if the fellow would make a sign. Like ice at the first breath of spring, the Creole's face almost broke. Then it hardened in a renewed frost of pride as that hack stopped with steaming horses and two sable-clad figures came across the grass: Caspar, all in dramatic black, even to gloves and cane; Nonor, her crinoline

billowing about her like a cloud of night, her face just a haunted shadow under her bonnet.

"Cupid—Rollo—no, no, no—don't fight."

Then Caspar, flourishing a stage bow to the important ones, wiping his forehead with a black-bordered handkerchief:

"Thank God, we are in time. Gentlemen, I have something to say—the duel must not proceed."

It was a cold audience to which he played. The eyes of that group were as those of dead fish at this intrusion of the footlights in the day realities of important persons. But Caspar had a part to perform, and he spared no whit of its drama.

"Last night, in the agitation of the moment—two hot-headed young men who would not listen—and Miss Bel-Sidis in collapse. I had thought that Mr. Aguirre understood it was all a little joke—

"Gentlemen—Miss Bel-Sidis has been my wife for five years."

Silence, thick with things that could not be spoken! Dominick found himself strangling a laughter which would have jangled horridly on that stillness. Poor Caspar, so agitated that he had forgotten to mention the trivial fact which would have stopped this tragic farce of a duel! He saw it now, for the manager's air was one of triumph: Nonor Ben-Sidis fought over almost to the death of Roland Aguirre! That meant a theatre packed for a week as all New Orleans flocked to see the siren.

The Texan slapped a lean leg as he chuckled: "And he got his hair cut for a married woman!"

Like Lucifer in all his pride, Aguirre stalked away. Very like Nonor, that Creole, only totally reversed. But even as she, he dwelt in a world of his

own, the perpetual center of its stage, stalked by the fear of pain to his self-esteem. That pain was now upon him, but its lesson was still unlearned. One glimpse of his face was warrant that Dominick would never be forgiven. The doors of New Orleans were closed against him.

Two tiny hands were pressed on Dominick's chest; Nonor's voice came up at him from under a veil of crêpe.

"Oh, Cupid, you're not dead? I cried all night—I wanted to tell you—but Caspar—"

"I understand," Dominick soothed. "You did your best."

"Oh—I did—I did."

"And now you will have your theatre and your roses and your applause."

"You dear thing," she almost smiled. "But—I don't know, it doesn't seem so much after all— Oh, Cupid, what have you done to me?"

"Done to you?"

"Yes—I—I can't understand it."

There was humanity in the gaze she lifted to him. Where before there had been but fear of pain, now there was the actual shadow of it, keen, but endured and softening.

"I could have been—different—with you, Cupid," she choked.

Mists parting to let in the southern sun; a black-clad Columbine touched by the radiance of the transformation scene: she could have been "different" with him; but he saw that that difference was already upon her.

"It means that you will sing as never before," he said; "that you will have a new hold upon the

hearts of men. We have all suffered, all of us—and now you will understand."

He drew the opal string from his pocket. Three of the jewels had been severed from the others, the silver link broken by the bullet. He laid them in her hand; they seemed to belong to her.

"And you will take these—in remembrance."

"In remembrance, Cupid—always."

He looked at the others, gleaming palely in the gathering sunlight. "A rosary of souls" the monk had called them. Three were gone now. He wondered what would be the tale of those still left.

REVOLUTION OF A LADY

By Dana Burnet

Once there was a lovely lady who was so bored that she went for a drive. At least she started out for a drive, but to drift about New York in her Rolls-Royce landaulet without a destination seemed purposeless, and because her whole life was purposeless she decided to buy a pearl. That, as it turned out, was a most important decision, though, as a matter of fact, what she actually bought that morning was two chicken sandwiches with mayonnaise and a bottle of olives.

The lovely lady's name was Patricia; she was heiress to a large fortune—a ridiculously large fortune—and on the whole she was unhappy. That also was ridiculous, and she knew it. For had she not all the prime desiderata that tend to create human happiness? She was young, rich, beautiful and, since her father's death, completely independent. She had a charming little duplex apartment in upper Park Avenue, for which she paid twenty or thirty thousand a year—she never could remember which. And there were several gentlemen, of varying degrees of wealth and distinction, who wanted to marry her.

That was one of the reasons why she was unhappy. Because, she told herself, she undoubtedly

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would marry one of them some day; and that day, unless something happened meanwhile, would be soon. Patricia Dean had no intention of going to her grave an old maid. Spinsterhood, carried to such an extreme, would be just a little too ridiculous.

What she wanted to happen she herself didn't know. At least she didn't know how to set about making it happen, which is practically the same thing. But at times, and especially this spring—it was now mid-April—she wished vaguely but passionately that her world were not so fixed and smoothly articulated, so cushioned with ease and so quietly unalterable.

"I could do," thought Patricia, as the car swung into Fifth Avenue, "with an earthquake or a revolution, or something. I suppose it's selfish of me, but really a revolution would be such a nice change!"

She imagined herself the storm center of a mob of ardent proletarians who would burst into her apartment (provided they could get by the doorman, which wasn't likely), smash her best china and threaten her, for owning best china, with all sorts of dire mishaps. She would be wearing some appropriately dramatic costume, and through it all would smoke calmly a Russian cigarette in a long jade holder. And at the last moment she would be firmly and enjoyably rescued by the tall, handsome, rather artistic-looking young man who always (she understood) commanded these upheavals. He would look perhaps something like that carelessly dressed young man who was standing on the sidewalk there.

The car had stopped, in obedience to a traffic signal, near the curb. The young man on the sidewalk was only a few feet away. He seemed to be

gazing fixedly, with an air of quiet amusement, at something across Fifth Avenue—at that incredible stone pile of a house with the stone gateway guarded by two lions couchant, perhaps, which had been built by some oil baron out of the West who recently had died and left it to his youthful and—no doubt—appreciative widow.

What an interesting face, really!

"I rather wish he'd look this way," murmured Patricia idly.

And as though in response to her wish, the young man turned and gazed directly into her eyes.

Patricia was conscious of a kind of electric shock to her nerves, followed instantly by an almost furious resentment.

It made her very angry, that look! And it was foolishly unjust and mistaken. How dare people—that young man, for instance!—assume at a glance that she was precious, or—worst of all—unattainable?

She ventured another glance at the young man on the sidewalk. He was still looking at her in that way, in that infuriating pedestrian way. "Really!" exploded Patricia to herself, "I've a good mind to—"

And then, somehow, she dared. Leaning forward quickly, she opened the door of the car and said in a clear, firm voice: "Get in!"

The young man started and stepped forward. "I beg your pardon? Were you speaking to me?"

"I was," said Patricia.

"And you said—?"

"I said, 'Get in!' I'll say 'please' if you insist on it, but I—"

"Oh, not at all, not at all!" The young man's hat

was now in his hand. He had rather light blond hair, parted in the middle and brushed straight back from a broad forehead. His eyes were blue. They were bluer when he smiled. "Not at all," he repeated politely; and then: "You mean that you want me to get into the car?"

"I do," said Patricia.

"Then I will," said the young man, and got into the car.

Patricia picked up the speaking tube.

"Go ahead, Thompson."

The chauffeur's ears twitched an acknowledgment of this command.

"Now," announced Patricia, "I'll explain. I'll tell you just why I—"

"Don't," murmured the young man seated beside her.

"Don't what?"

"Don't explain."

"But I must!"

"Oh, well. . . . Of course, if you must—I was only thinking how delightful it is, as it is, without explanations to make it reasonable."

"It isn't reasonable," said Patricia, "and no amount of explanation could make it so."

"So much the better," replied the young man. "And on a day like this too! Why, when I left my boarding house this morning I said to myself, 'Today I'll do something really worth while. I'll cultivate my soul. I'll go down to the Battery and visit the Aquarium—"

"The Aquarium?"

"Have you never been to the Aquarium—"

"I've never been anywhere," replied Patricia, now

grown slightly plaintive, "except Europe and Asia and northern Africa and Palm Beach and Bar Harbor and Newport and California and Hot Springs, Virginia. I've really never been anywhere at all."

"And where," he asked eagerly, "are you going now?"

"To buy a pearl," she told him.

"Is it a very important pearl?"

"Oh, no. Nothing I do is important."

"Then—permit me!" exclaimed the young man, and, reaching over, seized the speaking tube.

"Hello! I say! Drive to the Aquarium. Down Broadway to the Battery, you know."

Patricia noticed with delight that Thompson's ears positively waggled. "Why," somewhat breathlessly, "does one go to the Aquarium?"

"To look at fish. Large and small. There's also a seal in a tank."

"I think," remarked Patricia, after due reflection, "that I might enjoy the seal. And now, if you don't mind, I really *would* like to explain why I asked you to get into my car."

The young man relaxed into the expensive upholstery.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Yes. Quite."

"It was because of the way you looked at me."

"The way I— And how did I look at you?"

"You looked," said Patricia accusingly, "as though you considered me—" She paused. There was a brief silence. The young man, glancing sidewise at the lovely lady sitting beside him, noticed a faint flush mantling her cheek. "No," she said finally, "I don't believe I can explain after all. But for years—for as long as I can remember—people have been looking

at me like that! As though I were some sort of curio—some especially fragile and expensive piece of bric-à-brac in a jeweler's shopwindow! And I simply can't *stand* it. It's so *unfair*."

"Pardon me," said the young man, with a courteous wave of his hand, "but really you're quite mistaken in your interpretation of my look."

"Mistaken?"

"Yes. It's my impression, it's distinctly my impression, that I looked at you merely with—shall we say—gratitude?"

"Gratitude!" exclaimed Patricia.

"You were so beautiful, so unexpectedly, so strikingly beautiful. And since I, as I've already told you, had determined to spend this day in a religious search for beauty—"

"Oh! Are you religious?"

"Sometimes I am," replied the young man gravely, "and sometimes I'm not. It all depends on how I feel when I get up in the morning."

"Oh!" repeated Patricia, in a slightly fainter tone. Then, drawing a deep breath, she turned toward him and said: "Would you mind very much—I'll admit that I am curious—telling me who you are?"

He smiled charmingly into her eyes.

"Forgive me," he said. "But if I do that, you'll no longer be curious."

"But I—"

"At the moment you're interested in me, not as a person, but as a possibility. I may be anyone or anything. I may be an adventurer, a poet, an artist, a clerk out of a job, a highwayman on a holiday, a rich man's son, a college professor, a gentleman burglar, or whatever you choose to think me."

"But I don't choose!" retorted Patricia, feeling both bewildered and fascinated by the young man's imaginative resource.

"Then I must make my own selection," he said cheerfully. "And today—things being as they are—I think I shall choose to be a rich man's son. A very rich man's son, if you don't mind."

"How perfectly silly!" she exclaimed. But she had at the same time some difficulty to keep from giggling. Good heavens! She hadn't giggled since she left boarding school.

"So our fortunes at least are on a par," he went on. "For I assume that you are wealthy. And, that point being settled, I will now tell you my name."

"Yes, do!"

"Let me see," said, surprisingly enough, the young man. "I think it's Pierce, or Price, or something. Yes, it's Price. And the first name I'm sure is James."

Patricia's cool dark eyes regarded him with wonder. Then a faint smile flickered over her lips: a distant and slightly disdainful smile.

"In other words, you don't *want* to tell me your name."

"Won't James Price do? I rather like it myself. It's direct and simple and seems rather appropriate to a rich man's son."

"But I remember—I'm sure I heard you say—that you lived in a boarding house?"

"I forgot to say that I'm an *eccentric* rich man's son."

"You're most exasperating!" cried Patricia suddenly.

"Dear lady," he said, with his charming smile,

"don't you understand that I'm merely trying to piece out my natural deficiencies in order to make myself—at least momentarily—interesting to you? If I told you the truth about myself, you'd immediately place me. You'd visualize my background. I'd become a man, commonplace and unworthy, a unit in the procession of unworthy men who must have passed in review before your lovely and discriminating eyes. . . ."

"Mr. Price! Are you quite sure you're not a poet? Because I suspect that you are."

"No," he answered. "But I suspect that I will be by the time we reach the Battery, when you tell me your name."

"My name? I'm Patricia Dean. . . ."

The Aquarium was quiet, isolated, curiously churchlike in its tone and atmosphere. Patricia and Mr. Price walked about the circular promenade, looking at fish of all sorts, colors, conditions and manners, from brook trout to the tiny, tropical seahorse, from swordfish to sunfish.

They also looked at the seal, which reminded Patricia of a coat she had bought at Christmas time, and which had been stolen at a restaurant. This led to a discussion of crime, and Mr. Price said that frequently he had been tempted to try his hand at burglary, but had been restrained by the current police placards, which informed him, in blazing red type, that he couldn't win.

"And as I'm rather fond of winning—"

"But it would be rather nice," commented Patricia, "to be able to say I'd met a gentleman burglar."

"Oh, well, I may change my mind and take up

crime one of these days. Perhaps tomorrow, or the next day. . . ."

Patricia laughed. But Mr. Price looked thoughtful, which was really quite amusing of him.

When they came out of the Aquarium, Thompson was waiting. Thompson, reflected Patricia, was always waiting. Standing there in the sunlight, she glanced slowly around. She saw the grass plots of Battery Park spreading shy, green carpets for the arrival of that capricious alien, spring. She saw shabby people sitting idle on the Park benches, and off to the right the gray haze of the harbor and a tall ship drowsing at anchor near Bedloe's Island. And suddenly she could not endure the sight of Thompson, waiting.

"That's all for today," she told the chauffeur calmly. "I won't need you any more."

"Very good, miss."

"Now I've done it," she said. "And luncheon's at one, and I'm sure I don't know what's come over me."

"Dear lady," implored Mr. Price, in his nicest manner and with his most enchanting smile, "do let's stay here and have luncheon on one of these luxurious benches. There must be a delicatessen store about here somewhere, though I must say I'm rather embarrassed by the fact that I've only a few cents—something less than a dollar, I believe—in my pocket."

Then Patricia laughed.

"What an awful predicament for a rich man's son to be in!"

"But, you see, I believe I forgot to mention the

fact that I don't come into my inheritance till I'm thirty."

"And how old are you now?"

"Twenty-nine."

"In that case," announced Patricia, "I shall buy the luncheon!" And she laughed again.

"Thanks very much, Miss Dean," said Mr. Price gravely. "I should be delighted to have luncheon with you today. And if you don't mind my saying so, I am happier at this moment than I've ever been in all my life before."

"Are you really?" said Patricia.

She could not sleep that night for thinking of the wonders that had befallen her. Not only had she eaten chicken sandwiches (with mayonnaise) on a park bench with an utter stranger, but she had seen a boatload of aliens land from Ellis Island; she had watched a great liner come dreaming up the bay; she had seen white gulls, such as one associates with lonely beaches in Maine or Florida (she always had been responsive to sea-gulls) soaring above the casual drift and traffic of the busy metropolitan waters. And most radical, most novel and most exciting of all, she had ridden back uptown, with Mr. Price, in the subway!

"Tomorrow," he said, leaving her, "we will walk across Brooklyn Bridge."

She had not agreed to this. She had not agreed to meet him at that same spot opposite the incredible house guarded by the two stone lions couchant. "I will never see Mr. Price again," breathed Patricia, that night, into the scented darkness of her exquisite bedroom; and having thus uttered her tribute to discretion, fell asleep at last, with that tranquillity of

conscience which comes from the knowledge that one may always change one's mind.

So the next morning she met Mr. Price at the appointed spot, at the appointed hour, in her landaulet.

"My chauffeur's ears are too large. Don't you agree with me?" she inquired of Mr. Price, when he had settled down on the seat beside her.

"It's the way they're placed," Mr. Price pointed out. "You see? That peculiar angle—"

"Yes, possibly it's the angle."

"Angles are very important," he announced authoritatively. "Today I'm an artist in search of angles. That's why we're going to walk out on Brooklyn Bridge and look at skyscrapers. Moreover, I'm a successful artist. I have two dollars in my pocket. I borrowed them from my landlady. So today I can take *you* to lunch."

"Mr. Price, if you are, by any chance, slightly mad, I think you ought not to deceive me about it. Because you really are so entertaining that I'd like to borrow your recipe."

"I'm not in the least mad, Miss Dean. In fact, I'm one of the few sane persons left alive in the world. Sanity, you know," he went on, with his charming gravity, "is ordinarily a matter of adjusting oneself to one's environment. In my case the process is simplified by the fact that I have no environment. I merely discover my mood and then find an environment to fit it. Incidentally, I think we'll have lunch at a Yiddish restaurant I know of in Houston Street. The food is delicious. Have you ever eaten a sturgeon sandwich, Miss Dean?"

"I never have," said Patricia; nor had she. "But,

speaking of environment," she went on, "I don't think that adjustment is the sole guaranty of sanity. Heaven knows, I'm adjusted to mine! I fit like a cog in a machine. And yet—as I've just hinted to you—there are times when madness would be a decided relief. Yesterday, for instance, I was wishing for an earthquake or a revolution—anything to shake me out of this ghastly routine of boredom that I call living!"

He looked at her. His eyes were very blue, and a little point of light danced in each.

"A revolution?" he said. "Well, perhaps that could be arranged."

"Oh, really? How nice of you to say so! And will you arrange it for me, Mr. Price?"

"I might."

"Then you're also a revolutionist?"

"Well, I once managed a little revolution of my own."

"How very thrilling!" exclaimed Patricia. "What did you do?"

"I fell in love," replied Mr. Price, simply.

"Oh!"

"I fell desperately in love."

"And did that—? Was that—? I mean, what happened?"

"Well, you see, my father, who had just made his fortune—I told you yesterday, I think, that my father was a very rich man—wanted me to do certain things, one of which was to marry an impoverished but titled English lady whom we had met, strangely enough, in England. We were visiting England in my father's yacht at the time."

"And the lady—?"

"Miss Dean, the lady was plain. She was one of the plainest ladies that it has ever been my misfortune to meet. It affected my nerves just to look at her. I became irritable. I lost weight. I couldn't sleep. And finally I rebelled. I left my father on the yacht, took the first steamer home and fell in love with another sort of lady, who happened to be dancing in Mr. Ziegfeld's Follies at the time."

"A chorus girl," murmured Patricia. "How nice!"

"It *was* nice, after the other. But my father didn't think so. You see, he'd followed me back to New York on his yacht! What did you say, Miss Dean?"

"I said, 'Very dramatic,'" replied Patricia, "but it doesn't matter. Please go on."

"Well, when my father found that I was adamant about this Lady of the Ensemble, he did things to me in his will. He cut me off with a paltry million, which—as I also have told you—I don't get till I'm thirty."

"Yes," said Patricia, "but what about your love affair? How *can* you keep me in such suspense?"

"Dear lady, it flopped."

"Flopped?"

"It died. Died quickly and without undue pain."

"But didn't you—I mean, didn't you really love the girl?"

"Madly! I loved her madly for almost a month, ending on All Fools' Day."

"Oh, merciful heaven, do tell me!" cried Patricia.

"Well, you see, when she heard that I'd been cut off with a mere million, and that she'd have to wait several years to get that—" Mr. Price paused, smiled, and expressively waved his hand.

"I see," said Patricia. "Poor boy! I suppose you were frightfully disillusioned?"

"At any rate," said Mr. Price, "I was free."

She sat quiet, very quiet and thoughtful, in her corner of the tonneau. Finally she said, not looking at him: "So you recommend falling in love as a form of revolutionary activity, Mr. Price?"

"It's one of the most effective forms, Miss Dean."

"Still," mused Patricia, "I don't think I'd like to be completely disillusioned."

"But one never is, you know."

"But one might be if one happened, for instance, to fall in love with a person who wasn't quite—"

"Quite what, Miss Dean?"

"Well, quite honest, shall we say?"

"Honesty," replied Mr. Price gently, "is such a comparative term. And now—"

Patricia leaned forward. "That's all, Thompson. I won't need you any more today."

"Very good, miss."

Let Thompson think what he liked. His ears were too large, anyway.

They walked across Brooklyn Bridge and looked at Manhattan, piled up high and handsome in the sun. To Patricia, unaccustomed, as are most New Yorkers, to the thrilling beauty of New York, it was an experience at once novel and humorous, delightful and deeply stirring.

She stood with Mr. Price at the crest of the bridge and was childishly grateful.

"But this isn't all, is it? You've got more, haven't you?"

"More what, Miss Dean?"

"Wonders," said Patricia. "Things up your sleeve!

Because I've a feeling that you're something of a magician too."

"You've guessed my secret," he said almost solemnly. "I am at heart a magician. I can take a lady out of a Rolls-Royce limousine and show her castles that don't know they are castles. And I can take things like dreams out of that lady's eyes."

"Things . . . like dreams?" repeated Patricia vaguely.

"Yes, I can do that. I have done that. Listen! . . . When you first looked at me yesterday you were angry and you were sad. There was a look in your eyes—because you were resentful of the trick that life had played you."

"The trick? What trick?"

"The oldest trick in the bag. All true magicians know it. It's quite simple, really. You take a child who dreams of being grown-up—a little girl, let's say, who plays at being a grand lady—and suddenly —presto!—the thing happens. The child is grown, the little girl becomes the lady of her pretense, and at the same time—this really is the essence of the trick—the dream vanishes."

"It does," admitted Patricia. "Oh, yes, it does!"

"So the world is full of sad and angry people who don't quite know what's happened to them and who go about looking for something they don't quite know they've lost."

"Please!" she said, "I should like to walk back across the bridge. It's rather cold, standing here."

"Dear lady," said Mr. Price as they started to walk again, "I ask you to believe in my magic a little."

A week passed. And every morning Patricia met James Price at the appointed spot, on the Park side

of Fifth Avenue, opposite the house with the two lions. She had given up meeting him in the car, because it was so much more fun to walk, or ride in subways or on elevated trains, to whatever destination they had in view. Also, it was more romantic, somehow.

Patricia by this time had reached a state of mind which she described as "being honest with herself." She was committed definitely to a romance, and knew it. "Not," she reflected over and over again, "that I'm in love with this man. Because I don't think I am, really. Oh, I'm sure I'm not! How can one be in love with a person whom one suspects of being merely a clever adventurer? But he amuses me. I enjoy being with him." Et cetera.

All their meetings, all their romantic and beautiful excursions to this or that point of the romantic and beautiful island of Manhattan, had occurred in broad daylight. But one afternoon he suggested that they do something really revolutionary. He suggested that they go rowing that evening on the lake in Central Park.

"Meet me at eight o'clock tonight," he begged in his nicest manner. But Patricia replied hastily that she couldn't, that she simply couldn't. "I have," she told him truthfully enough, "an engagement."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I suppose it's a nonbreakable engagement?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Patricia. "You see, it's with a man who wants to marry me."

"Patricia!"

"James?"

"Are you—do you, by any chance, happen to want to marry him, whoever he may be?"

"Well," said Patricia, without conscious coquetry, "he's a nice man. His name is Smithers. He has a blond mustache, a kind heart, and large interests in South America."

"In that case," said James, "I'll wait in the usual place till nine o'clock."

"But I've just told you—"

"Oh, I know! I know it's useless. I just said I'd wait. I'm not doing anything this evening. There's no one, so far as I know, who wants to marry *me*. So, you see, I'm quite free."

"So sorry," sighed Patricia, "but I really can't, you know."

However, as fate would have it, she was afflicted that evening about eight o'clock with a severe headache, so that when Mr. Smithers arrived he found her suffering. She was very brave about it, but he was as noble as she was brave, and said that he would go at once. But would she, he asked, permit him to take her to the Charity Masquerade Ball that was being given tomorrow night by that precious Mrs. Dunning, whom everyone thought so vivacious and amusing? "For of course you're going, Patricia?"

"I don't know. I suppose I am. Yes, you may come for me tomorrow night, if you like," she said, pressing her hand to her brow. And it was not till he had gone that she remembered that Mrs. Dunning was the chatelaine of the house guarded by the two lions couchant.

An hour later she was drifting about the restricted but delightful waters of the lake in Central Park in a rowboat propelled by James Price.

"Patricia?"

"Yes?"

"I love you."

A long pause, a hush, broken only by the far noises of a city unaware that it was both a castle and a symphony. . . .

"Take me home," said Patricia.

"Take you—do you mean it?"

"Yes, oh, yes! I mean it. I should never have come—"

He rowed back to the landing stage, helped her out of the boat and walked her in silence up the moonlit path. But soon they came to a bench, and it was Patricia who stopped and turned toward it. They sat on the bench, and he waited for her to speak.

"Why," she asked finally, "don't you tell me who you are?"

"You're a little suspicious of me, aren't you, Patricia?"

"I don't see why you need keep up this—this mystery about yourself. Oh, I'll admit that it was fascinating at first. But, after all, there's a limit to all fantasy—"

"Perhaps my reason isn't altogether fantastic."

"I suspect that it isn't," she told him frankly.

"Perhaps," he went on, "I wanted to make an experiment—"

"An experiment?"

"In human nature."

"I don't understand," said Patricia.

"I've always had a notion," he remarked in a steady, almost impersonal tone, "that it would be nice to be judged simply as a man, without the additional qualifications of background, position, occupation and what not."

"But those things matter!" she insisted. "They really count—a lot."

"Do they? At this moment?"

"Life isn't one moment. It's—"

"I know, I know. But I'm only asking for this one moment. I'm only asking that you look at me now, that you remember what I've been to you in the short time you've known me, and that you tell me now whether you—whether you love me."

"Love you? But I—! How can I? It's been only a week, a little more than a week. How can one fall in love in a week?"

"I loved you the moment I looked at you," asserted James Price, gazing not at her but at the moon.

"That's what you *say!*"

"You mean," he corrected, with a suggestion of irony, "that that's what they all say. But in my case it happens to be true. Love at first sight is not only quite possible, it's the only decent way to love!"

"No doubt," retorted Patricia coldly, "you've had plenty of experience."

"Yes, I've had experience. Who hasn't? But that's all beside the point. I love you—"

"No, don't! Please—"

"Do you love me, Patricia?"

"No! I won't tell you. I—"

"But you do," he said, and took her in his arms and kissed her.

For one blinding instant she again felt supremely and recklessly happy. Her lips involuntarily returned his kiss. But there was a certain defeat, a certain humiliation in it too. She freed herself and sprang up, gasping.

"If you'll—just—get me a taxi," she stammered, trying desperately to remember that she was Patricia Dean and not a strange girl who'd just been kissed on a park bench.

"Wouldn't you rather walk? Won't you walk with me?" he asked quietly.

She hesitated. Her dark eyes searched his in the moonlight.

"Very well," she said at last. "As far as Fifth Avenue—since it's the last time I'll ever see you."

They walked across the park together. When they reached Fifth Avenue she turned and held out her hand to him.

"Good-by," said Patricia.

"Good night," said James Price serenely. "I'll be here tomorrow morning at the same time."

Patricia shook her head.

"I'm sorry," she answered. "And—please don't think it's because you kissed me. I'm a woman, and all women enjoy being kissed . . . Don't they? But since you can't trust me with your secret—"

"My secret?"

"Since you won't tell me who you are—"

They were standing on the sidewalk outside the park, facing the house across Fifth Avenue, that fabulous house of the two lions which was at once magnificent and pathetic.

James Price said: "Are you, by any chance, going there"—with a nod toward the house—"tomorrow night?"

"Am I going?"

"To Mrs. Dunning's charity masquerade ball?"

"How do you— Yes, as it happens, I am. Mr.

Smithers is taking me. But how do you know about it?"

"I read the papers," he said, smiling.

"Oh!"

"And I'm glad you're going, because I thought I might go too."

"You!" cried Patricia. "But how can you? I mean, of course, unless—"

"Unless I've been invited? No, I haven't been invited. But I shall go just the same."

"You mean," she asked incredulously, "that you'd dare—"

"Oh, it won't take much daring. It'll be quite simple, really, for a magician of my attainments. So I'll see you tomorrow night, Patricia. And now, let me get you a taxi."

Socially Mrs. Dunning's Charity Masquerade Ball may or may not have been a success. It was difficult to tell. To be sure, everyone of social consequence was there, at one time or another, during the evening, but just why they were there was a question. Some, perhaps, actually had come for sweet charity's sake. But in general Mrs. Dunning's ball was attended because of a current impression in society that Mrs. Dunning herself was so amusing. So very unique, you know.

Patricia—in a Spanish gypsy costume that any Spanish gypsy would have mistaken for the court dress of a queen of heaven—did her best to avoid her hostess, the unique Mrs. Dunning.

This wasn't snobbery. It was discretion. For she had now, as ever, an unholy desire to shriek with laughter at the magnificence of this house and particularly at this bouncing, bespangled little woman

who in her maiden days, according to well-authenticated rumor, had been a waitress in a restaurant.

"Find me a nice, quiet corner and leave me," said Patricia to her escort, Mr. Smithers, "because I think the woman's funny. And I hate thinking that people are funny. It makes me ashamed of myself."

"I'll get you an ice," said Mr. Smithers, who was King Louis of France; and rushed off to get her an ice.

It was then that Mrs. Dunning discovered her.

"Miss Dean! Well! You certainly look perfectly darling. How *sweet* of you to come. I do hope you'll come to my little tea next Thursday. Very intimate. Only a hundred or so of my very best friends!"

"Really," replied Patricia. "Really, I—"

"Will you dance, Miss Dean?"

A tall man in the costume of a highwayman was bending over her. His eyes, shining through the holes in his black mask, smiled into hers. She rose quickly, murmuring apologies to Mrs. Dunning, and was swept away by the highwayman, who danced very well indeed.

"So you managed it!" exclaimed Patricia, glancing up at him.

"Yes. It was as simple as I told you it would be. I just walked in."

"And I was never going to see you again! I'd made up my mind to it. But you did me such a good turn in rescuing me from Mrs. Dunning—"

"Let's not talk," he said. "This is perfect. You dance beautifully, Patricia. . . . But of course you would! Beautiful, beautiful Patricia! I love you—"

"I thought you weren't going to talk?" she re-

minded him, with a laugh that sounded to her own ears strangely shrill.

She was appalled at the keenness of her joy in dancing with him. It was more than joy; it was intoxication. When it was over she felt curiously weak and dizzy. Her heart seemed suddenly to have stopped beating. She put her hand to her breast and said: "Take me out of this. Isn't there some place in this awful mausoleum where we can get away from the crowd?"

"Let's explore," said James Price.

She accompanied him through several great rooms, across a vast hallway and up a flight of marble stairs which led to a balcony screened by potted palms. There they sat unobserved on a marble bench and looked down on the scene below.

"Tell me the truth!" said Patricia to the highwayman sitting beside her. "Who, and what are you?"

"Am I to choose again? Then I shall take a tip from the old romances and choose to be the son of this house," replied James Price, with a laugh. "Or at least," he amended, "the stepson. For I shouldn't care, I think, to claim Mrs. Dunning, however admirable she may be, as my mother."

"No. I can quite understand your reluctance in that respect."

"You don't believe me. I can see that you don't believe me," he said, sighing.

"But you tell me such *incredible* lies!"

"Then I'll tell you the exact truth," he said, still smiling. "I've come here tonight to commit a crime. A burglary! You know, I said I might be tempted to take up crime one of these days."

"But that—" She tried to speak lightly and casually. "That's more than incredible. It's absurd."

"Ah! You don't recognize the truth when you hear it. And I'd always understood that truth was, by the very nature of it, distinguishable from falsehood."

She stared at him in complete bewilderment, and wretchedly, and angrily, too.

"What is it you want of me?" she demanded. "What is it you want me to believe?"

"I want you to believe in my love for you, Patricia. And, if you can, in your love for me."

"But I can't, I can't! At least I'm not sure. There's something in me—I suppose it's my training—that demands proof."

"Then wait here for me!" he said abruptly.

She sat quite still, waiting. But why? But what was she waiting for? Why should she continue to sit here, simply because he had told her to?

She got up, with a sense of unreality somehow fostered by the music from below stairs, and walked, as in a dream, in her theatrical Spanish gypsy's costume, along the corridor down which James Price had disappeared.

At the end of this hallway was a door partly closed. All the other doors she had passed were open. She opened this last one and found herself in a large boudoir which connected with a still larger bedroom. The two rooms were divided only by damask portières, and one of these was drawn back, so that Patricia had a clear view into the farther chamber, which was undoubtedly Mrs. Dunning's bedroom.

In this room she saw the figure of a highwayman standing before an old-fashioned cabinet; a piece of

furniture oddly out of place in all that extravagance of professional interior decoration. So also, thought Patricia feverishly, was the highwayman out of place. For as she stepped noiselessly across the boudoir, just as he reached the damask portières, she saw him remove a small drawer from the upper part of the cabinet, take something from it—the gesture was unmistakable—and slip that something into his breast pocket.

Instinctively she would have spoken; cried out. But just at that moment an interruption of another sort occurred.

A door opened from the hall into the bedroom, and a man came in. He was in evening clothes, but there was something official about his large and stolid person. There was something still more official about the way he kept his right hand glued to his right hip pocket. He coughed. Patricia, concealed behind the portières, saw James Price whirl and face him.

"Pardon me," said the official-looking man.

"Certainly," said James Price.

"I'd like to ask what you're doin' in Mrs. Dunning's bedroom."

"I was looking at this cabinet. I understand it's quite old. A genuine antique, I believe. . . ."

"So you're interested in antiques, are you?"

James Price smiled his characteristic smile. Its charm was apparent even under his mask.

"I'm interested," he said, "in everything."

"Well," returned the other phlegmatically. "Maybe Mrs. Dunning will be glad to know you're interested in her—antiques. And again maybe she won't."

"Suppose," suggested the highwayman, "we ask her?"

"Just my idea exactly. I've already sent for her. And let's have a look at your pan, old-timer!" And, stepping forward, he snatched the mask from the highwayman's face.

And at precisely that moment Mrs. Dunning walked, or bounced, into the room.

"What's this? A thief in the house? Why did you send for me, Officer?"

"Because I didn't want to make no mistake, Mrs. Dunning. Now if you'll kindly take a look at this man." He made a gesture toward the highwayman. "Have you ever seen him before?"

"Never!"

"Sure, Mrs. Dunning?"

"Well, I—his face does seem sort of familiar, but I—No! I'm positive I've never seen him before." And turning to the detective the bespangled and bewildered creature asked almost plaintively: "How did he get into the house? And what's he doing in my bedroom?"

"He says he just dropped in to admire the furniture. But I guess we might as well search him to make sure that he ain't took somethin' for a souvenir."

James Price stiffened. Patricia could see his slender, graceful body grow taut.

"Keep your hands off me, you—"

"Easy, easy. I'm just gonna feel around in your pockets, young man."

"I tell you to keep your hands off—"

"You make another move and I'll drill you!" blared the detective. "Put your own hands up! Come on, stick 'em up, fella! That's right. Now you stand still while I go through your pockets—"

"But really," said Patricia, stepping out from behind the portières, "how absurd! Why should anyone go through Mr. Price's pockets?"

"Who the— Who are you?" blurted out the detective, turning to stare at her. But Mrs. Dunning cried: "Miss Dean! Oh, Miss Dean, how perfectly sweet— I mean, how funny that you should be here!"

"No," returned Patricia, "it really isn't funny at all. Rather embarrassing, perhaps, but not funny." She advanced, smiling like an angel—a Spanish gypsy angel—toward her hostess. "Dear Mrs. Dunning, forgive me! But, you see, Mr. Price is an old friend of mine. And I did so want him to meet you that I —well, of course I should have asked you if I might—I mean—bring him here tonight, but I knew you'd be so busy, and I was so *sure* you wouldn't mind—"

"Why, Miss Dean, of course not! Any friend of yours is *more* than welcome—"

"And you see," Patricia plunged on gallantly, "I happened to know that your bedroom was one of the loveliest examples of"—(what in the name of Heaven was it an example of?)—"of modern American interior decoration—"

"Oh, Miss Dean!" breathed the now ecstatic Mrs. Dunning.

"And since my friend Mr. Price is *intensely* interested in interior decoration—modern American, I mean—I took the liberty of bringing him up here and showing him your room."

"Excuse me, lady!" It was the detective speaking. "But if you brought him up here why wasn't you with him? What I mean, why was you hidin' behind them curtains?"

"Hiding!" repeated Patricia haughtily. "I wasn't hiding. As a matter of fact, I had stopped before that perfectly adorable little gold mirror in Mrs. Dunning's boudoir to powder my nose."

"But I don't see—"

"Officer!" now trumpeted Mrs. Dunning emotionally. "No more questions! I will not have you insulting this lady. This lady is one of my nearest, dearest friends. Go at once."

And the detective went.

"Dear Mrs. Dunning," murmured Patricia.

"Dear Miss Dean! I must apologize. And to you, too, Mr. Price—"

For the first time since Patricia had entered the room James Price spoke. He said: "Not at all, Mrs. Dunning. I was very much amused. Novel sensation, being mistaken for a burglar. I always enjoy novel sensations. And now, if you don't mind, I'll say good night."

"Oh, but you're not going, Mr. Price?" protested his hostess.

"I'm afraid I must. Good night, Mrs. Dunning. Good night, Miss Dean."

"Good night," said Patricia, and slowly, as though with an effort, held out her hand.

The highwayman bent and kissed it.

"Thank you so much," he said lightly, "for your indorsement of my character. And good night again."

"Good-by," said Patricia.

James Price smiled and walked out of the room.

The next morning, about eleven o'clock a very bored lady, a very sad and angry lady was driving down Fifth Avenue in her Rolls-Royce landaulet.

She was on her way to buy a pearl. It was not an important pearl. Nothing she could do or think of was important, except possibly her chauffeur's ears, which were unusually large and distinctly annoying.

"Really!" thought the lady, "I shall have to ask Thompson to do something about his ears . . . And what on earth is he stopping for? Oh, how can he stop just here! How dare he stop?"

Then she saw on the sidewalk a young man whom she recognized. And before she could move or speak —if indeed she had been able to move or speak—the young man had stepped forward, had opened the door and got quickly into the car.

"Good morning, Patricia," said James Price.

Mechanically Patricia picked up the speaking tube. "Go ahead, Thompson."

The car rolled quietly forward. She turned her head and looked at the man seated beside her.

"Very dramatic," she said, "but rather superfluous, don't you think?"

"Patricia," he asked, "do you love me?"

"I did, last night," she answered, wearily. "I knew it, I knew I loved you—you see, I can tell you this now because it really doesn't matter—the moment I saw you take—whatever it was you stole from Mrs. Dunning's cabinet."

"It was this," said James Price.

He held out his hand. In the palm of it she saw a diamond ring—a thin circlet of gold set with a small, an almost pathetically small solitaire.

"My mother's engagement ring," said James Price.

Patricia's heart gave a great bound. The world danced before her eyes.

"Your mother's? What on earth do you mean?"

"My name is James Price Dunning. My father married twice. The present Mrs. Dunning is my stepmother, but, as it happens, I'd never seen her till last night. I'd never wanted to. My father married her after his quarrel with me. I think I told you how disappointed he was when I refused to marry into English society. He had ambitions, my father had! But I couldn't see things his way, so I—"

"So you fell in love with a chorus girl!"

"I did more than that. I shipped on a British tramp steamer that was bound for the Orient. I was gone three years. Just two weeks ago I got back to New York, and it wasn't till then that I discovered, through my lawyer, that my father had married the lady who was so gracious to me last night."

"But you—you might have *asked* her for the ring! I mean, if it belonged to your own mother."

"I tried that—through my lawyer. I tried asking her. But she refused. I suppose she'd been advised that I might try to make trouble over the will, and she wasn't going to weaken her position by giving up anything. So I made up my mind to get the ring somehow. Steal it, if necessary. And now, thanks to you, I've stolen it. Let's see if it will fit, Patricia."

"Fit? Fit what?" murmured Patricia.

"You know what," he said.

And it seemed that she did know, for almost immediately she stripped the glove from her left hand and held up the third finger of that hand for him to do with as he would. So he did with it as he would, and as luck would have it, the ring fitted perfectly.

"Presto!" exclaimed James Price Dunning.

"But why, why, why," cried Patricia, "didn't you tell me all this long ago?"

"Dear lady," he answered, "if I'd told you all this long ago then we would never have visited the Aquarium. We would never have walked across Brooklyn Bridge or done any of the other silly and important things—the really revolutionary things—that most people don't do because they know each other too well to begin with. By the way, where were you going this morning?"

"I can't remember," said Patricia.

"It's such a beautiful morning," he observed, "that I thought we might do something especially interesting. Have you ever visited the Marriage License Bureau in the Municipal Building?"

"No," replied Patricia faintly.

"Then permit me," he said, and reaching over grasped the speaking tube that depended near her right shoulder.

"Hello! I say! Drive to the Municipal Building."

And then, settling back in his seat, he looked at Patricia.

"I suppose it would be a little too revolutionary," he said, "if I kissed you in broad daylight, driving down Fifth Avenue?"

"Yes," said Patricia, "it would. So please do."

And, because it was such a beautiful morning, he did.

ARABIAN KNIGHTS

By Octavus Roy Cohen

J. Cæsar Clump, director-in-chief for the Midnight Pictures Corporation, Inc., of Birmingham, Alabama, reclined in a hammock and gazed languidly down upon the city of Algiers. He was engaged in the task of whipping his brain into a subjective state, in order that he might more efficiently consider a new story idea suggested that morning by Forcep Swain, Midnight's elegant author.

Physical conditions were ideal. He was surrounded by the vivid vegetation of the hotel gardens. Overhead the sun streamed warmly from an unflecked sky. Through the iron grill of the garden gates he could see the narrow, winding streets of Mustapha Superieur, fashionable suburb of Algiers: and far below the harbor stretched—all sapphire and burnished gold, studded with small and picturesque ships: fishing boats with queer, triangular sails; decrepit tramp steamers from Gibraltar, Marseilles, Venice, Naples, Genoa and North African ports; one tremendous liner stopping over in Algiers for a day in the course of a world cruise.

He extracted from his pocket a package of American cigarettes, liberally besprinkled with Algerian

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revenue stamps. He selected one, lighted it, and luxuriously inhaled the rich Virginia tobacco. He raised his putteed legs from the ground, settled them comfortably in the hammock, removed a checkered cap, and closed his eyes in order to give his thought processes the benefit of full physical comfort.

And then his superb serenity was shattered by a crashing in the shrubbery and a hoarse voice bellowing his name. Director Clump sat up and stared with ill-concealed hostility toward the sound.

"Mistuh Clump!" came the harsh, masculine call: "Hey, Cæsar! Where is you at?"

The director sighed and shook his head. Always when he slipped away for an hour of undisturbed thought, there was something to destroy his tranquillity. And usually it was this same person.

He waited resignedly until the enormous figure of Opus Randall, Midnight's most popular comedian, burst through a hedge of flowers and confronted him.

Mr. Randall was hot, tired, and indignant. His massive chest was heaving with exertion, his pudgy face was beaded with perspiration, and his fat legs trembled.

One glance at the face of the leading actor, and Director Clump knew that peace had departed for the afternoon. There were times when Opus was trying beyond the point of endurance—and this was one of the times. Cæsar Clump assumed a resigned look, waved a languid hand, and voiced a question.

"Well, Opus—wha's eatin' you now?"

Mr. Randall came close and hovered over the recumbent figure, upon which he gazed with ill-concealed hostility. His voice quivered with fury.

"Wha's the matter? Huh! That you could lay

down there an' ask me such!" He doubled one big fist and spanked it into the palm of the other hand. "I reckon you know as well as me wha's the matter."

"Well, if you know an' I know—then us bofe knows, an' there ain't no need talkin' about it."

"Gittin' sarcastical, is you? Just like you been doin' ever since us first come to Africa. You think you can talk to me like that—an' ride me all the time when us is workin'—an' gimme dirty work to do. I's good an' sick an' tired of it, an' I ain't gwine stan' it another minute."

"What does you aim to do?" inquired the director. His tone was smooth, but anger was commencing to smolder within the narrow bosom.

"Plenty!"

"What, f'r instant?"

Opus spluttered. He choked. He knew very well there was nothing he could do—but he hated to be reminded of that fact. Director Clump saw his opportunity and was quick to press the advantage.

"Now listen at me, Fat Boy. Ever since us left Bumminham you has been makin' trouble. Nothin' ever suits you. Always you is fightin' with Florian Slappey or Welford Potts or Aleck Champagne—or somebody. An' now you comes bustin' in on my solichude yellin' 'cause I has been givin' you some funny scenes——"

"Funny? Great Sufferin' Tripe! Who says they is funny? You reckon it's funny fo' me that you should chuck me overboard fo' some fishermen to pull up in a net . . . an' then a dawg-gone octopus gits in that net with me an' I is almost drowned an' besides also scared to death? I guess you think I just laughed myse'f sick, don't you? An' was it funny I

should fall down them stone steps in the native quarter this mawnin'? Why di'n't you tell me there was a rope across that street?"

Mr. Clump explained patiently. "I wanted the fall to look nachel."

"Oooooow! So that's it? An' you takes a chance of bustin' me all up! A lot you care does I crack my neck. Why don't you give Welford Potts some of them terrible things to do? Why is it always me, me, me when it comes to gittin' beat up?"

Mr. Clump rose and his voice crackled. "Stop! You quit kickin' an' listen at me! I craves to make somethin' plain to yo' fat head—once an' fo' all time. You signed up with this comp'ny to play slapstick comedy. You is a comedian an' that's all what you is. But ev'ything you gits tol' to do, you raises a howl. What do you think you is, anyhow—a tragedian? Wantin' to play *Hamlick* or somethin' like that? Now I'se finished, th'oo and done with you. I has exhausted my temper an' next time you do any of this yellin aroun' you gits fined an' laid off without sal'ry. Git that clear. I has tried to keep fum havin' trouble with you. I has let you buzz aroun' like a crazy hawssfly . . . but I'se finished. You ain't nothin' but a straw an' I is a camel's back. I has done broke! Now—git!"

Opus stared intently at his chief. It was the first time he had ever seen the immaculate little man aroused to a high pitch of ill humor and instinct warned him that Mr. Clump had been exasperated to the absolute limit of his endurance.

Opus was no fool. He swung around with what dignity he could master and crashed away through the flowers and palms. He assumed a grand manner,

but he knew that his bluff had been called—and he boiled with rage.

Mr. Randall wished to convey the impression that he accepted the dictum of his director. He wished Mr. Clump to lower his guard in order that the force of Opus's retaliating blow might be unimpaired. Mr. Randall vowed vengeance! And, what was more, he knew precisely how he intended wreaking it.

He moved through the luxurious gardens in search of a particular person. He found her in a tiny palm grove, sipping tea and eating little cakes. She was a slender and attractive creature of undoubted strength of character. Opus bowed low.

"Good evenin', Mis' Clump."

"Evenin', Opus. How is you this evenin'?"

"Tol'able, thank you." He seated himself opposite, and yawned. "Algiers suttinly bores me. Nothin' to do an' heaps of time to do it in."

Mrs. Sicily Clump smiled. "Reckon you must be the only bored pusson in the Midnight troupe, Opus."

"How come? Ain't Cæsar bored?"

"My husban'?" She gestured in negation. "Nossuh, he showly ain't. He says this is the finest town fo' pitchers we has found since we come abroad. All day he wuks an' at night he goes out an' gathers material."

"Oh! he does?" Opus eyed her speculatively and tried to make his question casual. "Is he goin' out tonight?"

"Showly."

"Where?"

"Down to the water front to watch the ships an' git ideas. Him an' Florian Slappey is goin'."

Mr. Randall emitted a large and raucous laugh, and Mrs. Clump leaned forward.

"What at is you laughin', Brother Randall?"

"Nothin', Mis' Clump. Nothin' at all—'cept that a lady which has been ma'ied to a man as long as you has, should b'lieve such fumadiddles."

"You mean my husban' ain't gwine to no water front? You mean you know where him an' Florian is really goin'?"

"Uh-huh." Mr. Randall drummed on the table-top. "Now you mind, Sicily—I ain't tryin' to start somethin'. But I happen to know that where Cæsar an' Florian really is goin' is down to a Arab dancin'-girl place on a li'l alley right off that Rue de la Kasba we seen the other day."

Sicily smiled. "Tha's where you is wrong, Opus. The place what you mention, Florian an' my husban' went to las' night with my permission."

"Aaah! An' they had such a good time with them cullud dancin' ladies that tonight they goes back without tellin' you they is doin' such." Opus rose ponderously. "Sicily, what you ain't got in you' haid is no brains."

He retired in excellent order, leaving Sicily Clump sitting straight up in her chair, eyes focused upon a tangerine. She knew instinctively that Opus had spoken the truth, and her wifely wrath was beginning to mount.

Reviewing the events of the past week, it seemed as though her husband and Florian had been unnaturally zealous in their hunt for filmable material. Last night Cæsar had told her frankly that he wished to visit a hall where Algerian girls performed Arab dances. His frankness disarmed her, and she gave

her permission. But if, tonight, he was returning to the dance hall and concealing his intention of doing so—then she felt that it behooved her, as a lawfully wedded spouse, to do something.

Mr. Randall was thoroughly satisfied with the start he had made. He knew Sicily was no bungler. He realized that she would proceed carefully—and to the complete eventual discomfiture of the dapper director who persisted in making Opus's life one misery after another. Meanwhile he seated himself on the ground with his back against an orange tree and lost himself in thought. A peaceful smile played about his lips and until a voice broke upon his ears he was unaware of another's presence in the vicinity.

"What is you so happy about, Opus?"

Mr. Randall looked up at the trim little figure of Edwin Boscoe Fizz, Midnight's second director. Mr. Randall frowned. He resented the imputation that he was happy.

"I'se mis'able!" he snapped. "Entirely an' completely unhappy."

"How come you is smilin', then?"

"Just got to fool people. 'Fraid if I don't smile, folks will stop thinkin' I'se a comedjin. But my heart ain't smilin', Eddie—it's bustin'."

Mr. Fizz seated himself beside the portly actor. "Shuh! Opus, that ain't no way to talk. S'pose you tell me what's wrong?"

Mr. Randall was quite willing to unburden himself. "I showly wisht you was my director, Eddie—instead of that uppity, strutful Cæsar Clump. What I think of that feller——"

Eddie Fizz stiffened. "Quit talkin' that away, Opus. Cæsar Clump is the fondest man I is of."

"Well, I ain't gwine be yo' rival. You is a better man than him an' a better director. Was you handlin' me, you woul'n't be doin' me the dirty tricks he is."

"Like what, f'rinstance?"

Opus unfolded his worries and laid them out before the eyes of Eddie Fizz. But somehow, Eddie failed to agree with him, even though he was sympathetic. Soft-heartedness was one of Eddie's greatest shortcomings. "I think you takes things all wrong, Opus," he volunteered. "Wasn't you such a good actor, you woul'n't git so much rough stuff to do. An' you is lucky to have such a swell director as Cæsar——"

"Piffles! That slice of tripe! That——"

"You cain't call him out of his name befo' me!" Eddie had risen and was confronting the infuriated Opus with aggressive loyalty.

"I reckon I can. I ain't quarrelin' with you, Eddie. I like you fine. But I has got my 'pinion of Mustuh Julius Cæsar Clump an' there ain't nobody gwine change me. N'r neither I ain't no pusson to sit back idle an' git stepped on. Cæsar has insulted me, an' when I'se insulted I fights! I'se gwine make that feller wish he hadn't never been bawn. I'se gwine——"

"Is you threatenin' him?"

"Tha's the one thing I ain't doin' nothin' else but!"

Mr. Fizz turned away. "I cain't listen to you no mo' then, Opus. Us is friends, but Cæsar is mo' friendlier with me than you, so I bids you a respective good evenin'."

Opus stared after the slim figure. He liked Eddie—couldn't help liking the modest, inoffensive little man

whose genius for comedy had elevated him to his present important post over the handicap of a shy, sensitive disposition. But he resented Eddie's loyalty to Cæsar Clump.

What if Clump had worked with Eddie and taught him all he knew? What if Eddie had attained directorship through handling Sicily Clump when her husband failed? Gratitude was one thing, but Opus felt that Mr. Fizz carried it to the point of insanity.

As for Eddie Fizz, he was considerably worried. He discounted Opus's threats, of course. Opus was always threatening somebody. He was an inveterate trouble maker, the single member of the Midnight troupe possessing a violent case of temperament. But, just the same, it was well for him to know—as Cæsar's stanch friend—that there was somebody in the organization who bore him ill-will.

A low whistle was wafted to his ears. He traced it with his eyes and saw that it came from the lips of the elegant Mr. Florian Slappey. Florian leaned out of the window and called softly.

"Hey, Eddie—come up to my room a minute."

Mr. Fizz obeyed. He mounted the stairway and entered the bare little cubicle which Mr. Slappey occupied in solitary state. Then his eyes fell upon the other occupant of the room.

"Hello, Cæsar."

"Howdye, Eddie."

Florian dropped an affectionate hand on Eddie's shoulder and spoke beatifically. "Man! where Cæsar an' I was las' night!"

"That dancin'-girl place?"

"Uh-huh!" Florian rolled his eyes. "Hot diggity dawg!"

J. Cæsar Clump chuckled. "How 'bout you goin' back there with us tonight, Eddie?"

Mr. Fizz frowned. "You goin' back there?"

"Tha's the most thing we is aimin' to do."

"But Cæsar—how come Sicily lets you return to a place like that?"

Mr. Clump laughed loudly. "Shuh! Eddie, she don't know nothin' 'bout it. She thinks I an' Florian is gwine be gallivantin' aroun' the water front lookin' fo' lit'ry material."

"No!"

"Yea. Golla! she woul'n't dream of leavin' me go to see no Algiers dancin' girls a secon' time. Once was bad enough. So I an' Florian framed this story an' right away she says all right we can go. Now we was thinkin' that you would have the time of yo' life. . . . Boy! until you has visited that place, you ain't been nowhere an' you ain't seen nothin'. How 'bout it?"

Eddie shook his head. "Nothin' stirrin', Cæsar. Glorious woul'n't never say yes."

"You ain't got to 'splain ev'ything to yo' wife, has you?"

"Uh-huh. Us promised each other that."

Florian grimaced. "What good is a wife if you cain't break promises to her? C'mon, Eddie—be a good sport."

"Cain't make it, boys." He stared at Cæsar thoughtfully. "Anybody but me know where you-all is goin'?"

"I don't reckon so."

"Well, don't tell nobody then."

Cæsar smiled affectionately. "Ol' Sad Face! Why not?"

"'Cause ev'body in this comp'ny ain't yo' friend, Cæsar. An' was Sicily to find out where you was at——"

Both men whistled expressively. Eddie wished them luck and went his way. Once out of the room Florian and Cæsar looked apprehensively at each other.

"What you reckon he meant, Florian?"

"Talkin' 'bout Opus Randall, mos' prob'ly. He's hatin' you plenty in the las' few days."

"He don't know nothin' 'bout this trip tonight, does he?"

"Showly not." There was the faintest quiver of doubt in Florian's voice. "Co'se I guess there's some in the comp'ny suspecks where we is gwine. We done a heap of talkin' this mawnin' an' Opus might of heard."

Mr. Clump's eyes narrowed hostilely. "If that fat slab of side-meat ever tol' my wife on me. . . . But shuh! we ain't doin' nothin' but borryin' trouble. Sicily don't suspeck nothin' an' us is gwine have the time of our lives."

Mr. Slappey grinned hugely. "Chief, when you said that you show spoke a parabola!"

At three o'clock that afternoon a party of three, consisting of Director Clump, Cameraman Exotic Hines and Author Forcep Swain, left the hotel on a tour of inspection. They were seeking locations for certain important comedy shots and were intent on business.

Mrs. Sicily Clump stood at her window and watched them go. They moved off down the Rue Michelet and passed from sight. Immediately Sicily swung into action.

She descended to the hotel gardens and quested for the company's official Algiers guide. She found him chatting amiably with two taxi drivers.

M. Fernand Boutierre was a decidedly estimable gentleman. His credentials were unimpeachable, as President Orifice R. Latimer had taken very good care to see after a certain thoroughly disastrous experience in Biskra.

Fernand was of medium height and modest structure. In complexion he was of that doubtful mahogany tinge which marks the native Algerian. Born and reared within the corporate limits of the sprawling, hilly city on the north African coast, Fernand had learned to speak French fluently. Later he had picked up bits of English from tourists and then had seriously studied the language until now it was his proud boast that he spoke it as good as a native.

A large tourist bureau had recommended Fernand without qualification. He was licensed by the police and they asserted that he was familiar with everything in Algiers from palace to pest-hole. He spoke on terms of respectful intimacy with officials and wharf-rats. Proprietors of two large halls where boule and baccarat flourished knew him well, and there was no iniquitous establishment in the city which was not eager to welcome him and his clients.

His chief recommendation was that wherever he chose to guide a person—there that person was safe. Being a native Algerian, he held high social rank among his kind. French shopkeepers and entertainment purveyors catered to the man.

Sicily Clump knew Fernand well, and liked him. She opened the interview by pressing in his hand a crisp, new hundred-franc note, realizing that this

made of Fernand her stanch ally—unless somebody happened to come along with more than a hundred francs.

She spoke earnestly and lengthily with M. Boutierre. At first he raised his hands in horror and shook his head violently. Once he offered to return her hundred francs. But Mrs. Clump was insistent. He spoke of risks and she volunteered to assume them. He told her he dared not jeopardize his very excellent position with Midnight, and she promised protection: she gave her word that he was to be merely an innocent bystander. And at the crucial instant of his indecision, she produced a second hundred-franc note.

Fernand was converted. Much against his better judgment he consented to put himself at her disposal. She then proceeded to speak more specifically and a half hour later the somewhat doubtful M. Boutierre boarded a tram for downtown, there to seek the native clothing shop of a very good friend. Frankly, Fernand regarded it as a very silly proceeding—entirely too much ado about nothing at all. What if this woman's husband cared to visit—for the second time in two nights—an irreproachable dancing establishment? Fernand shrugged. The mental ways of these American women were quite beyond him. Why, the place was so respectable that he frequently took tourist ladies to watch the dancing . . . invariably to their disappointment. Native Algerian dances lack considerable of the paprika which seasons the famous French can-can.

Shortly before the dinner hour Fernand returned from the native quarter with a large bundle and a suggestion. He had surveyed the situation from every

angle and finally made it quite clear to Sicily that he would take her to the dancing place only on condition that some colored gentleman in the company should accompany them. This, Fernand felt, would leave him in the clear should things go wrong.

Much to his amazement, Sicily did not protest. In fact, she instantly and heartily endorsed the idea and immediately went in search of Opus, whom she found staring down miserably upon the Mediterranean Sea.

Opus demurred. It was one thing to start the ball rolling, and quite another to trot along with it. Sicily used powerful argument, and eventually Opus consented to accompany them to the dance palace.

"But," said he, in qualification of his agreement, "I ain't gwine in. I goes downtown in the taxi with you-all, but when we gits to that place, I waits outside."

"Why?"

"You is gwine be disguised. I ain't. Minute I go in, Cæsar an' Florian reckernizes me . . . then the whole scheme goes blooie. Ain't that the truth?"

"Yeh . . . seems so."

"'Tis so. You don't wan yo' husban' to know you is there. An' with me waitin' outside, he won't know nothin'."

"Good enough. Now, you keep yo' eyes open this evenin', Brother Randall, an' as soon as Cæsar an' Florian starts downtown you hunt me up."

Dinner that evening was a gala affair. There was unusual jocularity and good nature, most of the laughter emanating from J. Cæsar Clump, Florian Slappey, Sicily Clump, and Opus Randall. The first two stood upon the threshold of a glorious evening, Sicily was

determined that any lurking suspicion on the part of her husband should be allayed and Opus was chuckling inwardly at the thought of the revenge he was about to take.

Mr. Randall was, as a matter of fact, in fine fettle. His deep voice boomed across the room. He fairly oozed high spirits. Personally unpopular as he was, the others were laughing with him—all save Director Edwin Boscoe Fizz, whose mild little eyes turned inquiringly upon the fat comedian. Mr. Fizz felt that there must be something sinister behind Opus's abrupt climb from the nadir of unhappiness to the zenith of jocularity.

By the time dinner ended, night had settled over Algiers in a rich, purple mantle. The sky was cloudless and spangled with stars. From the hotel veranda one could look down upon the sprawling city; the wide, tree-sentineled streets of the French quarter, the white houses and mosques in the native section. The panorama was weirdly beautiful in the moonlight. . . . Cæsar and Florian took their leave and, as long as they remained within earshot, discussed loudly the sort of pictorial material they hoped to discover on the proposed tour of the congested and malodorous water front.

Less than fifteen minutes after their departure, Sicily Clump answered a tap on her door. She took from M. Boutierre a sizable bundle, and talked with him briefly in subdued tones. She closed the door and started to dress.

Less than twenty minutes after that, Mrs. Sicily Clump, feminine star of Midnight productions, surveyed herself in the mirror. The reflection showed an Arab lady of unusual shapeliness, encased in a long,

flowing robe of white. The head was completely covered and the lower half of her face was concealed by a white veil. Only the eyes shone forth . . . and they were twinkling with a mixture of excitement and anger.

Sicily was well content. "Cæsar woul'n't never know me," she observed to her reflection. "In fack, I ain't so sure I'd reckernize myself."

She tapped on the door as a signal to Fernand, who was waiting in the hall. He entered and exclaimed rapturously, declaring that even an Algerian would mistake her for a native. He then bade her wait, while he inspected the narrow hall leading to the side door.

He returned in a few moments. Sicily took his arm, gathered her Arabian robe about her, and they slipped down the stairway, along the dark hall and thence into a taxi which was waiting outside. Opus was already there. He was enthusiastic. "Golla! Sicily—how moslemmed up you is!"

She smiled. "You is sure that they ain't nobody saw'n us?"

"Positively not. I been standin' heah waitin' an' nobody but the taxi driver ain't been near heah."

Mrs. Clump was satisfied. But neither she nor Opus knew of the loyalty which had aroused the suspicions of Eddie Fizz, nor of the determination with which he had shadowed Opus Randall since dinner.

Eddie had missed no move of Opus since the conclusion of that meal. He felt that something was brewing—and when Mr. Randall posted himself by the side door of the hotel, Mr. Fizz scrooched himself in the shadow of a nearby palm tree—and watched.

What he had just seen appeared to more than justify such pains as he had taken. First there had been Opus standing alone—expectantly. Then the figure of Fernand Boutierre appearing briefly, speaking a few words with the large actor; then beckoning with his right hand. At once, as though it had been waiting for this particular signal, a taxicab rolled out of line, and came to a halt near where Mr. Randall was standing. Opus immediately entered.

Fernand reëntered the hotel. He appeared again a few seconds later accompanied by a modestly veiled Arab woman. This couple joined Opus in the taxi and the vehicle rolled down the driveway toward the gate of the hotel grounds.

Eddie Fizz stepped out of the shadow of the palm tree. The Arab woman puzzled him. Then his mind flashed back over the episodes and apprehensions of the afternoon, and a great light broke upon him. He clapped his hands together and his eyes blazed.

"Ow!" he murmured, "what a dirty trick!"

His legs twinkled upstairs to his room, where he found his wife, Glorious. He spoke jerkily.

"Don' ast me no questions, honey; an' don't say nothin' to nobody no time. But Cæsar Clump is in trouble, an' I has got to git him out."

Mrs. Fizz patted his hand. "Go ahead, Eddie. I ain't gwine to say nothin', an' I won't repeat myse'f."

He was gone as abruptly as he entered. He shot out of the front door like a slender, black arrow and pitched himself into a taxi. He motioned the driver into the Rue Michelet and gestured toward the town below. Wild contortions indicated to his driver that he desired speed and plenty of it.

They started toward the lower town at a break-

neck rate, twisting this way and that, coming now within sight of the harbor, and again being hemmed in by high walls surrounding handsome homes. Eventually there appeared far ahead of them another car in the rear of which Eddie could discern the veiled and hooded figure of the woman he believed was Sicily Clump. In his very worst and most painstaking French he explained to the driver that he wished the other taxi trailed—but not too closely.

Their way led through the French quarter; a section of wide streets and imposing shops—very much like any city of France. Then they turned to the left and progress was slower. The streets narrowed, seeming to close in upon them. They rose sharply, buildings lost individuality . . . they found themselves in a twisting, tortuous maze of narrow cobblestoned alleys. The native quarter was picturesque, but not prepossessing. Lights glowed palely —intensifying the outer darkness; the streets were crowded with burnoosed Algerians moving with slow indifference, or merely squatting against the stucco walls and gazing with some hostility and considerable distaste toward the taxi. It was a silent section of the city; sinisterly quiet; narrow; treacherous. . . .

Meanwhile in the leading taxi, Sicily Clump was wondering whether she had allowed wifely indignation to vanquish common sense. In broad daylight the native quarter had attracted her. Now, she felt herself oppressed by vague fears. She fancied that she detected criticism in certain native eyes—as though they were asking what a veiled Algerian lady was doing in a taxicab with an American negro and a native guide.

Even the bazaars, so intriguing in the day time, were pale and uninteresting tonight. The ineffective lights glowed weirdly on the white walls . . . and there were blocks where there was no light at all; merely scores of ghostlike figures moving soundlessly in the night.

Sicily regretted the trip, but now that she had come this far she had no intention of turning back. Her resentment against her husband was flaming. It was all his fault! What right had he to force her to trail him down here!

"Is we near the place, Fernand?"

"Ver' near quite, madame. Almost are there."

She sighed. "Remember, Fernand—if I should be reckernized we is just gwine say that I was studyin' for a part I'se gwine play in a Arab pitcher, an' that I made you bring me heah."

"Madame is correct. For Arab part she desire to see Arab dance so Fernand is delight' to escort, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Oui—oui!" broke in Opus, "we gotcha, Fernand."

Their taxi moved with difficulty along the Rue Babel Oued, a populous street urgent with color, odor and life. In the center, and flanking both sides, were tiny shops displaying odds and ends: nondescript garments, bits of glassware, pieces of filmy silk, ragged and worthless rugs, squares of gaudy, imitation tapestry. Halfway along this narrow, pulsing thoroughfare they came to the corner of the Rue de la Kasba, where the Eglise Notre Dame des Victoires gleamed whitely in the moonlight. An ancient mosque of impressive dimensions and architecture, it affected Sicily Clump with a bad case of creeps.

But even more impressive was the narrow street they swung into after proceeding a few squares upgrade along the Rue de la Kasba. This was indeed the narrowest street they had yet traversed, and just as Sicily was on the point of reconsidering, the taxi stopped and Fernand announced that they had arrived.

The house before which they stood was more impressive than its somewhat squalid neighbors. It was of strictly Moorish design with an ornate entrance. Fernand instructed the taxi driver to keep his headlights burning until after he and Sicily had entered the house. Opus settled himself comfortably in the rear of the car and wished the others much luck.

Obviously Mr. Fernand Boutierre was well known in this particular establishment. The girl at the door smiled a greeting and gazed with casual curiosity at the figure of the veiled woman. Fernand walked ahead and Sicily followed, her heart thumping.

They came into a large room, perhaps twenty feet wide by forty in depth, across the width of which benches had been placed. But the second floor of the building did not form a ceiling to the room. Instead, a balcony circled the hall about sixteen feet above the first story, and leading off from this balcony were several ornately carved doorways.

At the lower end of the hall was the stage: a simple platform raised perhaps two feet from the floor. On this stage were dancers and orchestra.

As Sicily and Fernand seated themselves in a dark, obscure corner where they could not be recognized the orchestra sounded off. It performed this feat without undue formality. One portly Algerian lady

played deftly on an instrument resembling a flageolet, another scraped earnestly at a sort of fiddle. And the drummer drummed.

The drummer fascinated Mrs. Clump. For one thing, he seemed to be the only man connected with the enterprise; for another, he was a man of striking proportions. Probably six feet in height and correspondingly broad; with a vast chest and huge, muscular arms, he sat cross-legged in the middle of the stage and thumped with the fingers of both hands on the end of a huge kettle covered with tightly-stretched hide. The effect was inspiring: thumpy-thump-thump-thump! Thumpy-thump-thump-thump! Thumpy-thump . . . over and over again, marking time for the flageolet and fiddle.

The drummer seemed disinterested. His black eyes were unseeing, his dark-complexioned face inscrutable. He did not even look around when a young Arab lady, introduced in French as an Ouled Nail dancer from Biskra, arose and commenced to strut her stuff.

The dance, as such, was vastly disappointing, even to Sicily. This particular young woman was as fully dressed as her dozen sister performers who sat stolidly on the floor of the stage awaiting their turn. She wore an ornate blouse, baggy trousers, a few beads and a sort of veil. As she moved, the others clapped languidly, keeping time to the thumping of the Gargantuan drummer.

The dancer moved slowly and indifferently. If there was any intricacy in the steps, Sicily could not detect it. To her untutored eyes the lady seemed to be performing about one-quarter of a desultory daily dozen. She walked up and down the stage a

few times, smiled, bowed—and seated herself. At which signal another lady—equally bored and languid—arose.

But now Sicily turned her gaze from the stage, and her eyes came to rest on the figures of her truant husband and his friend.

It was obvious that J. Cæsar Clump and Florian Slappey were enjoying themselves hugely. They were sitting straight up in their chairs paying rapt attention to the modest undulations of the dancer then holding the boards. Once or twice they broke into spontaneous applause . . . and it was then that Mrs. Sicily Clump commenced to become angry in earnest.

She eyed them balefully through her veil. Once Cæsar looked straight at her. For an instant she feared detection, but he turned away disinterestedly. What mattered it to him that an Arab woman desired to see the dancers?

Two or three more numbers were performed, the giant thumper thumping steadily. Then Sicily saw her husband and Florian rise. They beckoned to the overlarge and overdark woman who seemed to be the proprietress and there ensued a difficult but evidently satisfactory conversation in French. Florian and Cæsar started for the door.

Sicily half rose from her seat, intending to confront her husband. But just as she would have started forward, Cæsar turned back toward the stage. The smile which he flung at the girls seemed to include them all, and he waved a cheery hand toward the fat duenna.

"So long, girls," called Cæsar gaily. "See you-all a li'l later!"

Sicily sank back in fury. So he was coming back

later, was he? She was quivering with righteous wrath as she watched them disappear through the front door. Once they had gone she swung violently on her guide.

"Fernand," she hissed, "you heard my husban' say just now he was comin' back, didn't you?"

"Oui, madame."

"Well, I crave to have you take me up yonder on the balcony. Then when him an' that wuthless Florian Slappey return back heah, I can watch what they does, an' they won't see me."

Fernand shrugged. He was under orders and receiving excellent pay. If a wife chose to act this way . . . He escorted Sicily up the twisting stairway leading to the balcony. Once there, Mrs. Clump took matters in her own hands.

She arranged two chairs where she and the guide might sit and gaze down onto the first floor without themselves being observed. To make assurance doubly sure, she borrowed an ornate Moorish screen from an adjoining room and placed this in front of the chairs. Then, firm-lipped and bright-eyed, she settled herself to wait until such time as Julius Cæsar Clump paid his return visit.

Meanwhile, another chapter in the drama was being enacted in the terrifyingly dark side street on which the dance house was located.

Mr. Edwin Boscoe Fizz was loyally on the job.

The task of trailing Sicily's taxi had not been simple, but eventually Eddie's chauffeur parked a block away from the spot where the other taxi was standing. Eddie commanded the man to extinguish his lights. Then the little director stepped to the

ground and pussyfooted up the alley toward the waiting car.

He was unobserved. The Stygian gloom of the alley afforded excellent protection and he came quite close to Sicily's car. There, in the glow of a light over the doorway, he saw the figure of the large and smug Opus Randall perched comfortably in a corner, a large cigar in his teeth.

Eddie stood motionless, observing Opus—and thinking. Sicily and Fernand were inside, he knew. If Cæsar was already there, then the rescue was too late. If not . . . Eddie took up his place in the shadows of a building and waited, prepared to intercept Cæsar in case he had not already arrived.

The door of the big Moorish house opened and in the pale yellow light of the entry, two masculine figures stood revealed. At the same instant a bit of melancholy music spurted into the street: the thump of drum and wail of *derbuka.* Eddie frowned in puzzlement. Sicily was inside, and Cæsar was leaving. Obviously he had not been confronted by the irate wife.

Cæsar and Florian started down the street. Opus Randall made himself as inconspicuous as possible. And Eddie Fizz—hesitating to accost his friends in full view of Opus—slunk along in the shadows until they turned a corner. He accelerated his pace and whistled softly. They turned in surprise.

"Well, if it ain't ol' Eddie Fizz! Coul'n't stan' the gaff! Dawg-gone yo' ol' hide——"

"Cease!" commanded the mild little man. "Cæsar—you is up to yo' neck in trouble."

Mr. Clump chuckled. "Boy! you says words but

they don't convey no inflammation. I asks you, How come?"

Eddie stepped close. "Was there a Arab lady sittin' in the dance place back yonder?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well," snapped Eddie, "there wasn't!"

"Huh? Be yo' age, boy. I seen the Arab lady——"

"You didn't do no such of a thing. The lady you seen which you thought was Arab, was Sicily Clump!"

There was an instant of hushed and bleak terror. Then doubt gripped the husbandly heart of Mr. Clump and questions cascaded from his lips. Briefly and graphically Eddie explained the situation and the sinister rôle in which Opus had cast himself. The eyes of Mr. Clump blazed with homicidal fury and he suggested that they immediately repair to the alley and start the evening right by completely exterminating Mr. Randall—a suggestion which Florian enthusiastically seconded.

Eddie restrained them. "When time comes fo' beatin' up that no-good ol' buzzard," he said, "I'se gwine he'p, an' he'p a-plenty. Any man which would do what he has done ain't wuth plantin' lilies on. But meanwhile, Cæsar, you got mo' impawtant things to consider. In the fust place, you got to conwince Sicily that you ain't gallivantin'."

"Hmph!" mourned Clump, "is that all?"

"'Tain't hard! Where yo' brains is at, feller? Now listen: Sicily seen you in there an' you was behavin' proper. You says you'se-f that you tol' the lady you'all was comin' back. Undoubtlessly, Sicily is waitin' fo' you to do same. All right: You an' Florian goes back an' I goes with you. You go

in an' talk loud about how bored you is an' how you wish you was home with yo' wife. An' you makes loud speechments about you got to go on down to the water front an' git material. Sicily heahs all that, an' she don't know you know she's there an' right away she sees she's done you injustice an' gits sorry. Maybe she don't even leave you know she is there, but goes back to the hotel instead. Then you comes in about an hour fum now an' goes right to her an' says, 'Honey, I an' Florian had to go back to that dance place fo' a few minutes, but it was awful.' That puts you all clear and makes things happy."

Director J. Cæsar Clump was staring pop-eyed at his friend.

"Eddie," he declared solemnly, "you ain't no man! You is simply a genius!"

The trio marked time for perhaps ten minutes. Then, filled with high purpose, they returned to the dance house. Clump rapped on the door and they were admitted. They moved through the ill-lighted hallway into the large room. At sight of them the music of drum and flageolet and *derbuka* immediately commenced and one of the Algerian ladies rose and commenced to undulate.

Wearing masks of innocence, the three gentlemen strode down the aisle. Cæsar surveyed the room out of the corners of his eyes. Then he stopped short and whispered uncertainly to Eddie Fizz.

"Eddie—where Sicily is at?"

From her post of vantage on the balcony, Mrs. Clump saw the three men glance affrightedly about the hall. But she did not hear the conversation.

"I dunno, Cæsar."

"She coul'n't of gone out, could she?"

"No. Nobody come out of heah, an' besides, wasn't Opus still sittin' outside in his taxi?"

"Then what——"

Florian Slappey had been gazing about with increasing fright. He clutched Mr. Clump's arm. "Cæsar—s'spose they 'scovered she wasn't no Arab lady an' done somethin' terrible to her?"

Genuine terror smote Mr. Clump. It was one thing for him to come down with his friend and enjoy a bit of dancing—and quite another to have his wife abducted.

And so—in this hour of danger—Mr. Clump became a very grim and determined man. He was convinced that Sicily was somewhere in the house, and he determined to know where—and to know promptly. His manner as he advanced to the stage was surcharged with hostility which those on the stage sensed.

Mr. Clump and his associates found themselves in a quandary. No one in the place could speak a word of English, and he knew practically no French. But a mere discrepancy in language could not affect his determination to save the fair Sicily from whatever trouble might have befallen her.

"Madame," he rasped, *"ou est mon femme?"*

The stout woman shook her head. On the balcony Sicily inquired of Fernand what Cæsar had said.

"I cannot comprehend way up here," answered M. Boutierre. "Also I do not know whether Mr. Clump speaks the French or the English."

"That's French," snapped Sicily.

Fernand shrugged. "I do not say. To me it sounds like English."

Cæsar was trying again. His voice barely carried to the balcony. *"Mon femme est ici,"* he asserted with decidedly American accent. *"Je demander ou est elle a!"*

The stout lady gestured hopelessly. Sicily again inquired of her guide what Cæsar was saying.

"I do not know, madame. The words they may be French but the sound is English and the meaning is absent."

Cæsar turned helplessly to Florian Slappey.

"You is smart, Florian—you try. An' tell her us ain't to be fooled with."

Mr. Slappey spoke without hesitation. *"Femme!"* he announced. *"Très bon femme! Vous cacher ou? Vous respondez* or we *est* going to staht somethin'. *Comprez?"*

The woman did not comprez. Neither did the bewildered Fernand on the balcony. "If they would not talk French!" he wailed. "I can speak French and therefore I cannot understand what they say."

Cæsar was glaring hostilely at the proprietress. To his way of thinking, both he and Mr. Slappey had spoken clearly and perfectly in French. It was inconceivable that they should not be readily understood. Therefore he believed that her look of blankness was affected to trick him.

Mr. Clump tried again. He raised his fists and shook them in the startled face of the fat Algerian lady. French verbs and nouns and adjectives tumbled all over the room. Nobody understood what he was saying, but it was obvious that he was exceedingly wrathy and on the verge of precipitating trouble.

From the back of the stage the large gentleman uncoiled himself and ostentatiously placed his drum

on the floor. Standing, he seemed even more formidable than when seated. His more-than-two-hundred pounds of sinew moved forward and hovered over the irate Cæsar.

He spoke in his native tongue. The words fell softly as snowflakes, but the eyes were level and cold. Ordinarily, the three colored gentlemen from Birmingham would have retreated in more or less good order, but now—confronted by the possibility of genuine danger to Sicily—no such thought entered their heads. Cæsar returned stare for stare.

"You long-drawed-out cracklin'!" he observed scathingly. "Thinkin' you can scare us!"

He stepped away and motioned the others into a conference. His voice dropped to a whisper.

"They is prob'ly holdin' Sicily prisoner," he announced. "I'se gwine find her, an' it'll take the whole Algiers army to stop me—let alone that tall boy. Is you-all with me, or does you crave to beat it befo' the action stahts?"

Florian hitched his belt together. "Reckon if you is boun' to git kilt, you could use a li'l comp'ny."

Mr. Fizz was equally ready, but his brain continued to function. "Befo' the row commences," he suggested, "le's go drag Opus Randall in heah. He's got plenty beef an' we can use him."

Cæsar grimaced. "He won't fight."

"Then," suggested Eddie calmly, "le's manslaughter him out yonder."

Still whispering, they moved into the alley. From the balcony Sicily and Fernand saw them go—apparently permanently. Sicily rose.

"Le's travel back to the hotel, Fernand."

M. Boutierre was quite willing. He started toward the stairway. Mrs. Clump restrained him.

"Ain't there another way out? My husban' will mos' likely be hangin' around that alley an' I don't crave fo' him to see me."

Fernand admitted that there was another exit, and through this he escorted Sicily from the house. But while they were reaching their decision and making their departure, much was happening in the alley.

The door of the taxi was flung violently open and the terrified Mr. Randall found himself staring into the frigid eyes of Director J. Cæsar Clump. Over Mr. Clump's shoulder he could glimpse the hostile countenances of Florian Slappey and Eddie Fizz. Cæsar spoke.

"Git out of that car, wuthless."

"Whaffo?"

"'Cause you stahted all this. It was you tol' Sicily where I was gwine be at tonight. If you hadn't of been suggestive, she never would of come. Now they has kidnapped her an' is holdin' her prisoner. Us four goes in an' commits a rescue."

Opus alighted, but exhibited marked reluctance. "I—I ain't yearnin' fo' no trouble."

"Boy! yo' yearns don't afflict me none whatsoever. You is in the middle of a whole mess of trouble right now. Inside that house there's li'ble to be a rough-house, an' you does yo' share. Otherwise us th'ee steps on you right heah an' now an' makes you into a pancake."

Opus considered flight and abandoned the idea. He stared at the three men and saw that they were de-

termined and desperate. He tried to appear cheerful. "Well, if you really needs my he'p . . ."

"Come along. Keep yo' mouf an' yo' fists shut!"

They barged through the front door. The dancing girls were cowering on the stage. The proprietress of the place rushed forward, chattering hysterically in French. And immediately behind her towered the warlike figure of the monster drummer. Cæsar acted as spokesman.

"You got *mon femme en haute* somewhere," he grated. "Us is gwine fetch her down. An' if this big hunk of cheese here tries to stop me, I'll——"

The Algerian gentleman and lady understood nothing of the situation. They did not connect the dark-skinned tourists with the veiled woman who had recently visited the place. All they could see was that these four men were obviously looking for trouble. Therefore the large man placed himself squarely across the path of J. Cæsar Clump.

To Mr. Clump this was a sinister maneuver. His voice came harshly.

"Out of my way, big boy! I'se gwine *en haute*——"

He put his foot on the first step. Iron fingers closed about his arm and he was jerked roughly aside.

Cæsar struck. He struck straight and hard and his fist spanked against the face of the Algerian. That individual let loose a bellow of rage and astonishment and leaped toward Mr. Clump.

Florian Slappey swung into action. Swiftly and with genuine skill, he executed a flying tackle. Algerian and Birminghamite struck the floor together.

At the same instant two flailing figures landed on top of the native. Cæsar and Eddie were small but enthusiastic.

It was then that the fight really started. The girls were shrieking. The fat proprietress flew howling into the street. On the floor four figures milled viciously.

Three against one, but the three were small and the one was a giant. Time after time he staggered to his feet with one or two men hanging to his arms and another punching viciously at his face. And in the background stood the terrified Opus Randall, too cowed to fight and entirely too scared to run. Once, from the mêlée, came Florian's voice——

"Git in heah, Opus. Us needs you!"

And Opus's honest answer. "I—I'se scared, Florian. You-all is doin' fine without me."

The voice of Mr. Fizz came back, expressing his opinion of Mr. Randall. Mr. Fizz was doing himself proud. He and his two friends were taking a fine beating, but they were inflicting more than a bit of punishment at the same time. They were now up, now down; benches and tables were knocked over; the native was roaring with rage . . . the three slender Birmingham negroes fought silently and desperately.

The tide of battle ebbed and flowed. It was an epic encounter; numbers against might—a trio of Lilliputians at grips with a dark-skinned Gulliver. And just when the battle was at its fiercest, when it was anybody's victory—or nobody's—the door was flung open and a weeping proprietress entered in the wake of two businesslike gendarmes.

The voice of authority rang through the room.

The two efficient figures surged into the middle of the battle and dragged the contestants apart. Then words began to fly.

The four men presented a sorry spectacle. Cæsar, Florian and Eddie were clad in rags, their faces resembled a boy's nightmare of a trip through an abattoir. The Algerian was scarcely any better. His clothing, too, was torn; his face pounded out of shape and his whole body bruised. Only Opus Randall showed no scars of battle . . . and even in their rage Florian and Eddie found time to express their opinion of him.

The woman and the drummer explained that they knew no reason for the disturbance. J. Cæsar struggled in his best French to explain that his wife was being held prisoner in the house. But they could not understand him, and so—struggling and protesting—he and Eddie and Florian and Opus . . . the latter screaming his innocence . . . were dragged to the police station.

It was a sadly bedraggled trio which confronted the sergeant at headquarters. But fortunately an interpreter was on duty and through him Cæsar explained what it was all about. The interpreter had heard of the movie company and had no reason to doubt the story told, although he made it quite clear that the Americans were laboring under a misapprehesion. The house, he affirmed, was eminently respectable and safe.

The quartet was dismissed from custody. Then the interpreter and a gendarme went with them to the dancing establishment. They searched the place and when the interpreter explained whom they were seeking, the fat woman told them she had long since

departed. Cæsar assuaged her grief with two one-hundred franc notes and profound apologies. Then he caused the interpreter to question her. The result was somewhat startling.

"She say," explained the interpreter, "that the lady who was here is Arab lady and not no American."

Florian, Cæsar and Eddie exchanged significant glances. Opus caught their meaning and hastened to speak.

"That was Sicily," he announced. "I'se sure of it."

"How come you is so sure?"

Mr. Randall found himself between the devil and the deep sea. "I just got a hunch," he affirmed. "I don't know nothin' fo' certain, but I'se positive anyhow."

They took Opus with them into the alley and bundled him into the taxi. The machine bumped and rolled down the narrow, ill-lighted, cobblestoned thoroughfare and the three participants in the recent battle groaned with each agonizing jerk of the antiquated machine.

Opus cowered in the corner. He felt that all was not as it should be. Instinct informed him that the end was not yet, and that he had erred in attempting to wreak revenge on Cæsar.

During the ride through the French quarter and thence toward the upper reaches of the city where their hotel was located, the three battlers spoke little and groaned much, but such words as dropped from their lips were fraught with unpleasant promise for Mr. Randall.

Eventually they swung in through the big iron gates, rolled under the trees that lined the hotel garden and came to a stop before the front door.

The trio of battered figures dragged themselves up the steps, completely surrounding the harried Opus. They moved into the lobby—where a picture of utter serenity presented itself.

Seated in an easy-chair, immersed in a London magazine, was Sicily Clump. She was calm and quiet and unruffled as she swept the newcomers with a curious gaze.

Cæsar started forward, his tone indicative of relief.

"Honeybunch!" he exulted, "you is safe!"

"What you mean, Cæsar? Safe?"

"Nothin' happened to you, did it?"

A slow smile creased Sicily's lips. She had determined to torture her husband with uncertainty.

"How come anythin' should occur to me, Mistuh Clump?"

Cæsar frowned. "Has you been out anywhere?"

And Sicily, mistress of the situation, shook her head.

"Goodness, no! I ain't been out of this hotel all evenin'."

A solemn and terrible hush fell upon the trio of slim young men who had lately been locked in deadly combat with a large and muscular drumbeater.

With one accord they turned and inspected the cringing Opus Randall. He started to speak, but before the words came, the others acted.

They acted efficiently, positively and immediately. Two arms hooked into Opus's and he found himself propelled into the darkness of the hotel gardens. An awful thought occurred to him—there swept over him the knowledge that no matter what developed he was in a horrid predicament.

They escorted him outside and surrounded him. Then, with ghastly ostentation, Cæsar, Eddie and Florian shed their torn coats and rolled up their sleeves.

Their eyes blazed with a fine and righteous light.

"Us is about to pufform a sweet duty," remarked Mr. Slappey casually.

Mr. Clump's voice carried slightly more bitterness. "An' all on account of this feller," he grated. "It was bad enough when us thought we was rescuin' Sicily. But to find out she never lef' this hotel, an' that we got beat up over some woman we don't even know . . ."

Opus stared wild-eyed from one to the other. He felt that it were better that the truth be known—far better than that they should think he had invented the entire story.

He knew he must convince them that Sicily had actually left the hotel to visit the dancing establishment.

His eye lighted on the bruised figure of Director Edwin Boscoe Fizz. Mr. Fizz could prove his case. . . .

"Eddie!" he wailed, "you know good an' well Sicily lef' this hotel tonight. You seen her go! Please, suh, tell these fellers that you know I is speakin' the truth."

Mr. Fizz caressed his biceps. Terror still sat largely upon him and he burned with indignation. The others moved closer. It became terribly apparent to Mr. Randall that his only hope for mercy lay with Mr. Fizz. If Eddie chose to testify that he spoke the truth about Sicily's absence . . .

"Eddie! Please . . . Don't you remember seein' Sicily Clump leave the hotel in the taxi?"

Eddie stared thoughtfully

Then he doubled his fists and nodded to Cæsar and Florian.

He addressed the cringing Mr. Randall—and his words shattered that gentleman's last forlorn hope.

"When that big drummer walloped me on the jaw," announced Mr. Fizz, "he knocked my memory plumb loose!"

BROTHER MORGAN'S STORY
OF
THE DREAM WOMAN

By Wilkie Collins

I

I had not been settled much more than six weeks in my country practice when I was sent for to a neighboring town, to consult with the resident medical man there on a case of very dangerous illness.

My horse had come down with me at the end of a long ride the night before, and had hurt himself, luckily, much more than he had hurt his master. Being deprived of the animal's services, I started for my destination by the coach (there were no railways at that time), and I hoped to get back again, toward the afternoon, in the same way.

After the consultation was over, I went to the principal inn of the town to wait for the coach. When it came up it was full inside and out. There was no resource left me but to get home as cheaply as I could by hiring a gig. The price asked for this accommodation struck me as being so extortionate, that I determined to look out for an inn of inferior pretensions, and to try if I could not make a better bargain with a less prosperous establishment.

I soon found a likely-looking house, dingy and quiet, with an old-fashioned sign, that had evidently

not been repainted for many years past. The landlord, in this case, was not above making a small profit, and as soon as we came to terms he rang the yard-bell to order the gig.

"Has Robert not come back from that errand?" asked the landlord, appealing to the waiter who answered the bell.

"No, sir, he hasn't."

"Well, then, you must wake up Isaac."

"Wake up Isaac!" I repeated; "that sounds rather odd. Do your ostlers go to bed in the daytime?"

"This one does," said the landlord, smiling to himself in rather a strange way.

"And dreams too," added the waiter; "I sha'n't forget the turn it gave me the first time I heard him."

"Never you mind about that," retorted the proprietor; "you go and rouse Isaac up. The gentleman's waiting for his gig."

The landlord's manner and the waiter's manner expressed a great deal more than they either of them said. I began to suspect that I might be on the trace of something professionally interesting to me as a medical man, and I thought I should like to look at the ostler before the waiter awakened him.

"Stop a minute," I interposed; "I have rather a fancy for seeing this man before you wake him up. I'm a doctor; and if this queer sleeping and dreaming of his comes from any thing wrong in his brain, I may be able to tell you what to do with him."

"I rather think you will find his complaint past all doctoring, sir," said the landlord; "but, if you would like to see him, you're welcome, I'm sure."

He led the way across a yard and down a passage

to the stables, opened one of the doors, and, waiting outside himself, told me to look in.

I found myself in a two-stall stable. In one of the stalls a horse was munching his corn; in the other an old man was lying asleep on the litter.

I stooped and looked at him attentively. It was a withered, woe-begone face. The eyebrows were painfully contracted; the mouth was fast set, and drawn down at the corners. The hollow wrinkled cheeks, and the scantly grizzled hair, told their own tale of some past sorrow or suffering. He was drawing his breath convulsively when I first looked at him, and in a moment more he began to talk in his sleep.

"Wake up!" I heard him say, in a quick whisper, through his clenched teeth. "Wake up there! Murder!"

He moved one lean arm slowly till it rested over his throat, shuddered a little, and turned on his straw. Then the arm left his throat, the hand stretched itself out, and clutched at the side toward which he had turned, as if he fancied himself to be grasping at the edge of something. I saw his lips move, and bent lower over him. He was still talking in his sleep.

"Light gray eyes," he murmured, "and a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it—all right, mother—fair white arms, with a down on them—little lady's hand, with a reddish look under the finger nails. The knife—always the cursed knife—first on one side, then on the other. Aha! you she-devil, where's the knife?"

At the last word his voice rose, and he grew restless on a sudden. I saw him shudder on the straw; his withered face became distorted, and he threw up

both his hands with a quick hysterical gasp. They struck against the bottom of the manger under which he lay, and the blow awakened him. I had just time to slip through the door and close it before his eyes were fairly open, and his senses his own again.

"Do you know anything about that man's past life?" I said to the landlord.

"Yes, sir, I know pretty well all about it," was the answer, "and an uncommon queer story it is. Most people don't believe it. It's true, though, for all that. Why, just look at him," continued the landlord, opening the stable door again. "Poor devil! he's so worn out with his restless nights that he's dropped back into his sleep already."

"Don't wake him," I said; "I'm in no hurry for the gig. Wait till the other man comes back from his errand; and, in the mean time, suppose I have some lunch and a bottle of sherry, and suppose you come and help me to get through it?"

The heart of mine host, as I had anticipated, warmed to me over his own wine. He soon became communicative on the subject of the man asleep in the stable, and by little and little I drew the whole story out of him. Extravagant and incredible as the events must appear to everybody, they are related here just as I heard them and just as they happened.

II

Some years ago there lived in the suburbs of a large sea-port town on the west coast of England a man in humble circumstances, by name Isaac Scatchard. His means of subsistence were derived from any employment that he could get as an ostler, and

occasionally, when times went well with him, from temporary engagements in service as stable-helper in private houses. Though a faithful, steady, and honest man, he got on badly in his calling. His ill luck was proverbial among his neighbors. He was always missing good opportunities by no fault of his own, and always living longest in service with amiable people who were not punctual payers of wages. "Unlucky Isaac" was his nickname in his own neighborhood, and no one could say that he did not richly deserve it.

With far more than one man's fair share of adversity to endure, Isaac had but one consolation to support him, and that was of the dreariest and most negative kind. He had no wife and children to increase his anxieties and add to the bitterness of his various failures in life. It might have been from mere insensibility, or it might have been from generous unwillingness to involve another in his own unlucky destiny; but the fact undoubtedly was, that he had arrived at the middle term of life without marrying, and, what is much more remarkable, without once exposing himself, from eighteen to eight-and-thirty, to the genial imputation of ever having had a sweetheart.

When he was out of service he lived alone with his widowed mother. Mrs. Scatchard was a woman above the average in her lowly station as to capacity and manners. She had seen better days, as the phrase is, but she never referred to them in the presence of curious visitors; and, though perfectly polite to every one who approached her, never cultivated any intimacies among her neighbors. She contrived to provide, hardly enough, for her simple wants by doing rough work for the tailors, and always managed to

keep a decent home for her son to return to whenever his ill luck drove him out helpless into the world.

One bleak autumn, when Isaac was getting on fast toward forty, and when he was, as usual, out of place through no fault of his own, he set forth from his mother's cottage on a long walk inland to a gentleman's seat where he had heard that a stable-helper was required.

It wanted then but two days of his birthday; and Mrs. Scatchard, with her usual fondness, made him promise, before he started, that he would be back in time to keep that anniversary with her, in as festive a way as their poor means would allow. It was easy for him to comply with this request, even supposing he slept a night each way on the road.

He was to start from home on Monday morning, and, whether he got the new place or not, he was to be back for his birthday dinner on Wednesday at two o'clock.

Arriving at his destination too late on the Monday night to make application for the stable-helper's place, he slept at the village inn, and in good time on the Tuesday morning presented himself at the gentleman's house to fill the vacant situation. Here again his ill luck pursued him as inexorably as ever. The excellent written testimonials to his character which he was able to produce availed him nothing; his long walk had been taken in vain: only the day before the stable-helper's place had been given to another man.

Isaac accepted this new disappointment resignedly and as a matter of course. Naturally slow in capacity, he had the bluntness of sensibility and phlegmatic

patience of disposition which frequently distinguish men with sluggishly-working mental powers. He thanked the gentleman's steward with his usual quiet civility for granting him an interview, and took his departure with no appearance of unusual depression in his face or manner.

Before starting on his homeward walk, he made some inquiries at the inn, and ascertained that he might save a few miles on his return by following a new road. Furnished with full instructions, several times repeated, as to the various turnings he was to take, he set forth on his homeward journey, and walked on all day with only one stoppage for bread and cheese. Just as it was getting toward dark, the rain came on and the wind began to rise, and he found himself, to make matters worse, in a part of the country with which he was entirely unacquainted, though he knew himself to be some fifteen miles from home. The first house he found to inquire at was a lonely roadside inn, standing on the outskirts of a thick wood. Solitary as the place looked, it was welcome to a lost man who was also hungry, thirsty, foot-sore, and wet. The landlord was civil and respectable-looking, and the price he asked for a bed was reasonable enough. Isaac therefore decided on stopping comfortably at the inn for that night.

He was constitutionally a temperate man. His supper consisted of two rashers of bacon, a slice of home-made bread, and a pint of ale. He did not go to bed immediately after his moderate meal, but sat up with the landlord, talking about his bad prospects and his long run of ill luck, and diverging from these topics to the subjects of horse-flesh and racing. Nothing was said either by himself, his host, or the few

laborers who strayed into the tap-room, which could, in the slightest degree, excite the very small and very dull imaginative faculty which Isaac Scatchard possessed.

At a little after eleven the house was closed. Isaac went round with the landlord and held the candle while the doors and lower windows were being secured. He noticed with surprise the strength of the bolts and bars, and iron-sheathed shutters.

"You see, we are rather lonely here," said the landlord. "We never have had any attempts made to break in yet, but it's always as well to be on the safe side. When nobody is sleeping here, I am the only man in the house. My wife and daughter are timid, and the servant-girl takes after her missusses. Another glass of ale before you turn in? No! Well, how such a sober man as you comes to be out of place is more than I can make out, for one. Here's where you're to sleep. You're our only lodger tonight, and I think you'll say my missus has done her best to make you comfortable. You're quite sure you won't have another glass of ale? Very well. Goodnight."

It was half past eleven by the clock in the passage as they went up stairs to the bedroom, the window of which looked on to the wood at the back of the house.

Isaac locked the door, set his candle on the chest of drawers, and wearily got ready for bed. The bleak autumn wind was still blowing, and the solemn, monotonous, surging moan of it in the wood was dreary and awful to hear through the night-silence. Isaac felt strangely wakeful. He resolved, as he lay down in bed, to keep the candle alight until he began

to grow sleepy, for there was something unendurably depressing in the bare idea of lying awake in the darkness, listening to the dismal, ceaseless moaning of the wind in the wood.

Sleep stole on him before he was aware of it. His eyes closed, and he fell off insensibly to rest without having so much as thought of extinguishing the candle.

The first sensation of which he was conscious after sinking into slumber was a strange shivering that ran through him suddenly from head to foot, and a dreadful sinking pain at the heart, such as he had never felt before. The shivering only disturbed his slumbers; the pain woke him instantly. In one moment he passed from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness—his eyes wide open—his mental perceptions cleared on a sudden, as if by a miracle.

The candle had burnt down nearly to the last morsel of tallow, but the top of the unsnuffed wick had just fallen off, and the light in the little room was, for the moment, fair and full.

Between the foot of his bed and the closed door there stood a woman with a knife in her hand, looking at him.

He was stricken speechless with terror, but he did not lose the preternatural clearness of his faculties, and he never took his eyes off the woman. She said not a word as they stared each other in the face, but she began to move slowly toward the left-hand side of the bed.

His eyes followed her. She was a fair, fine woman, with yellowish flaxen hair and light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. He noticed those things and fixed them on his mind before she was round at the

side of the bed. Speechless, with no expression in her face, with no noise following her footfall, she came closer and closer—stopped—and slowly raised the knife. He laid his right arm over his throat to save it; but, as he saw the knife coming down, threw his hand across the bed to the right side, and jerked his body over that way just as the knife descended on the mattress within an inch of his shoulder.

His eyes fixed on her arm and hand as she slowly drew her knife out of the bed: a white, well-shaped arm, with a pretty down lying lightly over the fair skin—a delicate lady's hand, with the crowning beauty of a pink flush under and round the finger nails.

She drew the knife out, and passed back again slowly to the foot of the bed; stopped there for a moment looking at him; then came on—still speechless, still with no expression on the blank, beautiful face, still with no sound following the stealthy footfalls—came on to the right side of the bed, where he now lay.

As she approached she raised the knife again, and he drew himself away to the left side. She struck, as before, right into the mattress, with a deliberate, perpendicularly-downward action of the arm. This time his eyes wandered from her to the knife. It was like the large clasp-knives which he had often seen laboring men use to cut their bread and bacon with. Her delicate little fingers did not conceal more than two thirds of the handle: he noticed that it was made of buck-horn, clean and shining as the blade was, and looking like new.

For the second time she drew the knife out, concealed it in the wide sleeve of her gown, then stopped by the bedside, watching him. For an instant

he saw her standing in that position, then the wick of the spent candle fell over into the socket; the flame diminished to a little blue point, and the room grew dark.

A moment, or less, if possible, passed so, and then the wick flamed up, smokingly, for the last time. His eyes were still looking eagerly over the right-hand side of the bed when the final flash of light came, but they discerned nothing. The fair woman with the knife was gone.

The conviction that he was alone again weakened the hold of the terror that had struck him dumb up to this time. The preternatural sharpness which the very intensity of his panic had mysteriously imparted to his faculties left them suddenly. His brain grew confused—his heart beat wildly—his ears opened for the first time since the appearance of the woman to a sense of the woeful ceaseless moaning of the wind among the trees. With the dreadful conviction of the reality of what he had seen still strong within him, he leaped out of bed, and screaming "Murder! Wake up, there! wake up!" dashed headlong through the darkness to the door.

It was fast locked, exactly as he had left it on going to bed.

His cries on starting up had alarmed the house. He heard the terrified, confused exclamations of women; he saw the master of the house approaching along the passage with his burning rush-candle in one hand and his gun in the other.

"What is it?" asked the landlord, breathlessly.

Isaac could only answer in a whisper. "A woman, with a knife in her hand," he gasped out. "In my

room—a fair, yellow-haired woman; she jobbed at me with the knife twice over."

The landlord's pale cheeks grew paler. He looked at Isaac eagerly by the flickering light of his candle, and his face began to get red again; his voice altered, too, as well as his complexion.

"She seems to have missed you twice," he said.

"I dodged the knife as it came down," Isaac went on, in the same scared whisper. "It struck the bed each time."

The landlord took his candle into the bedroom immediately. In less than a minute he came out again into the passage in a violent passion.

"The devil fly away with you and your woman with the knife! There isn't a mark in the bedclothes any where. What do you mean by coming into a man's place, and frightening his family out of their wits about a dream?"

"I'll leave your house," said Isaac, faintly. "Better out on the road, in rain and dark, on my road home, than back again in that room, after what I've seen in it. Lend me a light to get my clothes by, and tell me what I'm to pay."

"Pay!" cried the landlord, leading the way with his light sulkily into the bedroom. "You'll find your score on the slate when you go down stairs. I wouldn't have taken you in for all the money you've got about you if I'd known your dreaming, screeching ways beforehand. Look at the bed. Where's the cut of a knife in it? Look at the window—is the lock bursted? Look at the door (which I heard you fasten yourself)—is it broke in? A murdering woman with a knife in my house! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Isaac answered not a word. He huddled on his clothes, and then they went down stairs together.

"Nigh on twenty minutes past two!" said the landlord, as they passed the clock. "A nice time in the morning to frighten honest people out of their wits!"

Isaac paid his bill, and the landlord let him out at the front door, asking, with a grin of contempt, as he undid the strong fastenings, whether "the murdering woman got in that way."

They parted without a word on either side. The rain had ceased, but the night was dark, and the wind bleaker than ever. Little did the darkness, or the cold, or the uncertainty about the way home matter to Isaac. If he had been turned out into a wilderness in a thunder-storm, it would have been a relief after what he had suffered in the bedroom of the inn.

What was the fair woman with the knife? The creature of a dream, or that other creature from the unknown world called among men by the name of ghost? He could make nothing of the mystery—had made nothing of it, even when it was midday on Wednesday, and when he stood, at last, after many times missing his road, once more on the doorstep of home.

III

His mother came out eagerly to receive him. His face told her in a moment that something was wrong.

"I've lost the place; but that's my luck. I dreamed an ill dream last night, mother—or maybe I saw a ghost. Take it either way, it scared me out of my senses, and I'm not my own man again yet."

"Isaac, your face frightens me. Come in to the fire—come in, and tell mother all about it."

He was as anxious to tell as she was to hear; for it had been his hope, all the way home, that his mother, with her quicker capacity and superior knowledge, might be able to throw some light on the mystery which he could not clear up for himself. His memory of the dream was still mechanically vivid, though his thoughts were entirely confused by it.

His mother's face grew paler and paler as he went on. She never interrupted him by so much as a single word; but when he had done, she moved her chair close to his, put her arm round his neck, and said to him,

"Isaac, you dreamed your ill dream on this Wednesday morning. What time was it when you saw the fair woman with the knife in her hand?"

Isaac reflected on what the landlord had said when they had passed by the clock on his leaving the inn; allowed as nearly as he could for the time that must have elapsed between the unlocking of his bedroom door and the paying of his bill just before going away, and answered,

"Somewhere about two o'clock in the morning."

His mother suddenly quitted her hold of his neck, and struck her hands together with a gesture of despair.

"This Wednesday is your birthday, Isaac, and two o'clock in the morning was the time when you were born."

Isaac's capacities were not quick enough to catch the infection of his mother's superstitious dread. He was amazed, and a little startled also, when she suddenly rose from her chair, opened her old writing-desk, took pen, ink, and paper, and then said to him,

"Your memory is but a poor one, Isaac, and, now I'm an old woman, mine's not much better. I want all about this dream of yours to be as well known to both of us, years hence, as it is now. Tell me over again all you told me a minute ago, when you spoke of what the woman with the knife looked like."

Isaac obeyed, and marveled much as he saw his mother carefully set down on paper the very words that he was saying.

"Light gray eyes," she wrote, as they came to the descriptive part, "with a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it; white arms, with a down upon them; little lady's hand, with a reddish look about the finger nails; clasp-knife with a buck-horn handle, that seemed as good as new." To these particulars Mrs. Scatchard added the year, month, day of the week, and time in the morning when the woman of the dream appeared to her son. She then locked up the paper carefully in her writing-desk.

Neither on that day nor on any day after could her son induce her to return to the matter of the dream. She obstinately kept her thoughts about it to herself, and even refused to refer again to the paper in her writing-desk. Ere long Isaac grew weary of attempting to make her break her resolute silence; and time, which sooner or later wears out all things, gradually wore out the impression produced on him by the dream. He began by thinking of it carelessly, and he ended by not thinking of it at all.

The result was the more easily brought about by the advent of some important changes for the better in his prospects which commenced not long after

his terrible night's experience at the inn. He reaped at last the reward of his long and patient suffering under adversity by getting an excellent place, keeping it for seven years, and leaving it, on the death of his master, not only with an excellent character, but also with a comfortable annuity bequeathed to him as a reward for saving his mistress's life in a carriage accident. Thus it happened that Isaac Scatchard returned to his old mother, seven years after the time of the dream at the inn, with an annual sum of money at his disposal sufficient to keep them both in ease and independence for the rest of their lives.

The mother, whose health had been bad of late years, profited so much by the care bestowed on her and by freedom from money anxieties, that when Isaac's birthday came round she was able to sit up comfortably at table and dine with him.

On that day, as the evening drew on, Mrs. Scatchard discovered that a bottle of tonic medicine which she was accustomed to take, and in which she had fancied that a dose or more was still left, happened to be empty. Isaac immediately volunteered to go to the chemist's and get it filled again. It was as rainy and bleak an autumn night as on the memorable past occasion when he lost his way and slept at the road-side inn.

On going into the chemist's shop he was passed hurriedly by a poorly-dressed woman coming out of it. The glimpse he had of her face struck him, and he looked back after her as she descended the doorsteps.

"You're noticing that woman?" said the chemist's apprentice behind the counter. "It's my opinion

there's something wrong with her. She's been asking for laudanum to put to a bad tooth. Master's out for half an hour, and I told her I wasn't allowed to sell poison to strangers in his absence. She laughed in a queer way, and said she would come back in half an hour. If she expects master to serve her, I think she'll be disappointed. It's a case of suicide, sir, if ever there was one yet."

These words added immeasurably to the sudden interest in the woman which Isaac had felt at the first sight of her face. After he had got the medicine-bottle filled, he looked about anxiously for her as soon as he was out in the street. She was walking slowly up and down on the opposite side of the road. With his heart, very much to his own surprise, beating fast, Isaac crossed over and spoke to her.

He asked if she was in any distress. She pointed to her torn shawl, her scanty dress, her crushed, dirty bonnet; then moved under a lamp so as to let the light fall on her stern, pale, but still most beautiful face.

"I look like a comfortable, happy woman, don't I?" she said, with a bitter laugh.

She spoke with a purity of intonation which Isaac had never heard before from other than ladies' lips. Her slightest actions seemed to have the easy, negligent grace of a thorough-bred woman. Her skin, for all its poverty-stricken paleness, was as delicate as if her life had been passed in the enjoyment of every social comfort that wealth can purchase. Even her small, finely-shaped hands, gloveless as they were, had not lost their whiteness.

Little by little, in answer to his questions, the sad story of the woman came out. There is no need to

relate it here; it is told over and over again in police reports and paragraphs about attempted suicides.

"My name is Rebecca Murdoch," said the woman, as she ended. "I have ninepence left, and I thought of spending it at the chemist's over the way in securing a passage to the other world. Whatever it is, it can't be worse to me than this, so why should I stop here?"

Besides the natural compassion and sadness moved in his heart by what he heard, Isaac felt within him some mysterious influence at work all the time the woman was speaking which utterly confused his ideas and almost deprived him of his powers of speech. All that he could say in answer to her last reckless words was that he would prevent her from attempting her own life, if he followed her about all night to do it. His rough, trembling earnestness seemed to impress her.

"I won't occasion you that trouble," she answered, when he repeated his threat. "You have given me a fancy for living by speaking kindly to me. No need for the mockery of protestations and promises. You may believe me without them. Come to Fuller's Meadow tomorrow at twelve, and you will find me alive, to answer for myself—No!—no money. My ninepence will do to get me as good a night's lodging as I want."

She nodded and left him. He made no attempt to follow—he felt no suspicion that she was deceiving him.

"It's strange, but I can't help believing her," he said to himself, and walked away, bewildered, toward home.

On entering the house, his mind was still so completely absorbed by its new subject of interest that he took no notice of what his mother was doing when he came in with the bottle of medicine. She had opened her old writing-desk in his absence, and was now reading a paper attentively that lay inside it. On every birthday of Isaac's since she had written down the particulars of his dream from his own lips, she had been accustomed to read that same paper, and ponder over it in private.

The next day he went to Fuller's Meadow.

He had done only right in believing her so implicitly. She was there, punctual to a minute, to answer for herself. The last-left faint defenses in Isaac's heart against the fascination which a word or look from her began inscrutably to exercise over him sank down and vanished before her forever on that memorable morning.

When a man previously insensible to the influence of women forms an attachment in middle life, the instances are rare indeed, let the warning circumstances be what they may, in which he is found capable of freeing himself from the tyranny of the new ruling passion. The charm of being spoken to familiarly, fondly, and gratefully by a woman whose language and manners still retained enough of their early refinement to hint at the high social station that she had lost, would have been a dangerous luxury to a man of Isaac's rank at the age of twenty. But it was far more than that—it was certain ruin to him—now that his heart was opening unworthily to a new influence at that middle time of life when strong feelings of all kinds, once implanted, strike root most stubbornly in a man's moral nature. A few

more stolen interviews after that first morning in Fuller's Meadow completed his infatuation. In less than a month from the time when he first met her, Isaac Scatchard had consented to give Rebecca Murdoch a new interest in existence, and a chance of recovering the character she had lost by promising to make her his wife.

She had taken possession, not of his passions only, but of his faculties as well. All the mind he had he put into her keeping. She directed him on every point—even instructing him how to break the news of his approaching marriage in the safest manner to his mother.

"If you tell her how you met me and who I am at first," said the cunning woman, "she will move heaven and earth to prevent our marriage. Say I am the sister of one of your fellow-servants—ask her to see me before you go into any more particulars—and leave it to me to do the rest. I mean to make her love me next best to you, Isaac, before she knows any thing of who I really am."

The motive of the deceit was sufficient to sanctify it to Isaac. The stratagem proposed relieved him of his one great anxiety, and quieted his uneasy conscience on the subject of his mother. Still, there was something wanting to perfect his happiness, something that he could not realize, something mysteriously untraceable, and yet something that perpetually made itself felt; not when he was absent from Rebecca Murdoch, but, strange to say, when he was actually in her presence! She was kindness itself with him. She never made him feel his inferior capacities and inferior manners. She showed the sweetest anxiety to please him in the smallest trifles; but,

in spite of all these attractions, he never could feel quite at his ease with her. At their first meeting, there had mingled with his admiration, when he looked in her face, a faint, involuntary feeling of doubt whether that face was entirely strange to him. No after familiarity had the slightest effect on this inexplicable, wearisome uncertainty.

Concealing the truth as he had been directed, he announced his marriage engagement precipitately and confusedly to his mother on the day when he contracted it. Poor Mrs. Scatchard showed her perfect confidence in her son by flinging her arms round his neck, and giving him joy of having found at last, in the sister of one of his fellow-servants, a woman to comfort and care for him after his mother was gone. She was all eagerness to see the woman of her son's choice, and the next day was fixed for the introduction.

It was a bright sunny morning, and the little cottage parlor was full of light as Mrs. Scatchard, happy and expectant, dressed for the occasion in her Sunday gown, sat waiting for her son and her future daughter-in-law.

Punctual to the appointed time, Isaac hurriedly and nervously led his promised wife into the room. His mother rose to receive her—advanced a few steps, smiling—looked Rebecca full in the eyes, and suddenly stopped. Her face, which had been flushed the moment before, turned white in an instant; her eyes lost their expression of softness and kindness, and assumed a blank look of terror; her outstretched hands fell to her sides, and she staggered back a few steps with a low cry to her son.

"Isaac," she whispered, clutching him fast by the

arm when he asked alarmedly if she was taken ill, "Isaac, does that woman's face remind you of nothing?"

Before he could answer—before he could look round to where Rebecca stood, astonished and angered by her reception, at the lower end of the room, his mother pointed impatiently to her writing-desk, and gave him the key.

"Open it," she said, in a quick, breathless whisper.

"What does this mean? Why am I treated as if I had no business here? Does your mother want to insult me?" asked Rebecca, angrily.

"Open it, and give me the paper in the left-hand drawer. Quick! quick, for Heaven's sake!" said Mrs. Scatchard, shrinking farther back in terror.

Isaac gave her the paper. She looked it over eagerly for a moment, then followed Rebecca, who was now turning away haughtily to leave the room, and caught her by the shoulder—abruptly raised the long, loose sleeve of her gown, and glanced at her hand and arm. Something like fear began to steal over the angry expression of Rebecca's face as she shook herself free from the old woman's grasp. "Mad!" she said to herself; "and Isaac never told me." With these few words she left the room.

Isaac was hastening after her when his mother turned and stopped his farther progress. It wrung his heart to see the misery and terror in her face as she looked at him.

"Light gray eyes," she said, in low, mournful, awe-struck tones, pointing toward the open door; "a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it; white arms, with a down upon them; little lady's hand, with a reddish look under

the finger nails—*The Dream Woman,* Isaac, the Dream Woman!"

That faint cleaving doubt which he had never been able to shake off in Rebecca Murdoch's presence was fatally set at rest forever. He had seen *her* face, then, before—seven years before, on his birthday, in the bedroom of the lonely inn.

"Be warned! oh, my son, be warned! Isaac, Isaac, let her go, and do you stop with me!"

Something darkened the parlor window as those words were said. A sudden chill ran through him, and he glanced sidelong at the shadow. Rebecca Murdoch had come back. She was peering in curiously at them over the low window-blind.

"I have promised to marry, mother," he said, "and marry I must."

The tears came into his eyes as he spoke and dimmed his sight, but he could just discern the fatal face outside moving away again from the window.

His mother's head sank lower.

"Are you faint?" he whispered.

"Broken-hearted, Isaac."

He stooped down and kissed her. The shadow, as he did so, returned to the window, and the fatal face peered in curiously once more.

IV

Three weeks after that day Isaac and Rebecca were man and wife. All that was hopelessly dogged and stubborn in the man's moral nature seemed to have closed round his fatal passion, and to have fixed it unassailably in his heart.

After that first interview in the cottage parlor no

consideration would induce Mrs. Scatchard to see her son's wife again, or even to talk of her when Isaac tried hard to plead her cause after their marriage.

This course of conduct was not in any degree occasioned by a discovery of the degradation in which Rebecca had lived. There was no question of that between mother and son. There was no question of anything but the fearfully-exact resemblance between the living, breathing woman, and the spectre-woman of Isaac's dream.

Rebecca, on her side, neither felt nor expressed the slightest sorrow at the estrangement between herself and her mother-in-law. Isaac, for the sake of peace, had never contradicted her first idea that age and long illness had affected Mrs. Scatchard's mind. He even allowed his wife to upbraid him for not having confessed this to her at the time of their marriage engagement, rather than risk anything by hinting at the truth. The sacrifice of his integrity before his one all-mastering delusion seemed but a small thing, and cost his conscience but little after the sacrifices he had already made.

The time of waking from this delusion—the cruel and the rueful time—was not far off. After some quiet months of married life, as the summer was ending, and the year was getting on toward the month of his birthday, Isaac found his wife altering toward him. She grew sullen and contemptuous; she formed acquaintances of the most dangerous kind in defiance of his objections, his entreaties, and his commands; and, worst of all, she learned, ere long, after every fresh difference with her husband, to seek the deadly self-oblivion of drink. Little by little, after

the first miserable discovery that his wife was keeping company with drunkards, the shocking certainty forced itself on Isaac that she had grown to be a drunkard herself.

He had been in a sadly desponding state for some time before the occurrence of these domestic calamities. His mother's health, as he could but too plainly discern every time he went to see her at the cottage, was failing fast, and he upbraided himself in secret as the cause of the bodily and mental suffering she endured. When to his remorse on his mother's account was added the shame and misery occasioned by the discovery of his wife's degradation, he sank under the double trial—his face began to alter fast, and he looked what he was, a spirit-broken man.

His mother, still struggling bravely against the illness that was hurrying her to the grave, was the first to notice the sad alteration in him, and the first to hear of his last worst trouble with his wife. She could only weep bitterly on the day when he made his humiliating confession, but on the next occasion when he went to see her she had taken a resolution in reference to his domestic afflictions which astonished and even alarmed him. He found her dressed to go out, and on asking the reason received this answer:

"I am not long for this world, Isaac," she said, "and I shall not feel easy on my death-bed unless I have done my best to the last to make my son happy. I mean to put my own fears and my own feelings out of the question, and to go with you to your wife, and try what I can do to reclaim her. Give me your arm, Isaac, and let me do the last thing I can in this world to help my son before it is too late."

He could not disobey her, and they walked together slowly toward his miserable home.

It was only one o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the cottage where he lived. It was their dinner-hour, and Rebecca was in the kitchen. He was thus able to take his mother quietly into the parlor, and then prepare his wife for the interview. She had fortunately drunk but little at that early hour, and she was less sullen and capricious than usual.

He returned to his mother with his mind tolerably at ease. His wife soon followed him into the parlor, and the meeting between her and Mrs. Scatchard passed off better than he had ventured to anticipate, though he observed with secret apprehension that his mother, resolutely as she controlled herself in other respects, could not look his wife in the face when she spoke to her. It was a relief to him, therefore, when Rebecca began to lay the cloth.

She laid the cloth, brought in the bread-tray, and cut a slice from the loaf for her husband, then returned to the kitchen. At that moment, Isaac, still anxiously watching his mother, was startled by seeing the same ghastly change pass over her face which had altered it so awfully on the morning when Rebecca and she first met. Before he could say a word, she whispered, with a look of horror,

"Take me back—home, home again, Isaac. Come with me, and never go back again."

He was afraid to ask for an explanation; he could only sign to her to be silent, and help her quickly to the door. As they passed the bread-tray on the table she stopped and pointed to it.

"Did you see what your wife cut your bread with?" she asked, in a low whisper.

"No, mother—I was not noticing—what was it?"

"Look!"

He did look. A new clasp-knife, with a buck-horn handle, lay with the loaf in the bread-tray. He stretched out his hand shudderingly to possess himself of it; but, at the same time, there was a noise in the kitchen, and his mother caught at his arm.

"The knife of the dream! Isaac, I'm faint with fear. Take me away before she comes back."

He was hardly able to support her. The visible, tangible reality of the knife struck him with a panic, and utterly destroyed any faint doubts that he might have entertained up to this time in relation to the mysterious dream-warning of nearly eight years before. By a last desperate effort, he summoned self-possession enough to help his mother out of the house—so quietly that the "Dream Woman" (he thought of her by that name now) did not hear them departing from the kitchen.

"Don't go back, Isaac—don't go back!" implored Mrs. Scatchard, as he turned to go away, after seeing her safely seated again in her own room.

"I must get the knife," he answered, under his breath. His mother tried to stop him again, but he hurried out without another word.

On his return he found that his wife had discovered their secret departure from the house. She had been drinking, and was in a fury of passion. The dinner in the kitchen was flung under the grate; the cloth was off the parlor table. Where was the knife?"

Unwisely, he asked for it. She was only too glad of the opportunity of irritating him which the request afforded her. "He wanted the knife, did he? Could he give her a reason why? No! Then he

should not have it—not if he went down on his knees to ask for it." Further recriminations elicited the fact that she had bought it a bargain, and that she considered it her own especial property. Isaac saw the uselessness of attempting to get the knife by fair means, and determined to search for it, later in the day, in secret. The search was unsuccessful. Night came on, and he left the house to walk about the streets. He was afraid now to sleep in the same room with her.

Three weeks passed. Still sullenly enraged with him, she would not give up the knife; and still that fear of sleeping in the same room with her possessed him. He walked about at night, or dozed in the parlor, or sat watching by his mother's bedside. Before the expiration of the first week in the new month his mother died. It wanted then but ten days of her son's birthday. She had longed to live till that anniversary. Isaac was present at her death, and her last words in this world were addressed to him:

"Don't go back, my son, don't go back!"

He was obliged to go back, if it were only to watch his wife. Exasperated to the last degree by his distrust of her, she had revengefully sought to add a sting to his grief, during the last days of his mother's illness, by declaring that she would assert her right to attend the funeral. In spite of all that he could do or say, she held with wicked pertinacity to her word, and on the day appointed for the burial forced herself—inflamed and shameless with drink—into her husband's presence, and declared that she would walk in the funeral procession to his mother's grave.

This last worst outrage, accompanied by all that

was most insulting in word and look, maddened him for the moment. He struck her.

The instant the blow was dealt he repented it. She crouched down, silent, in a corner of the room, and eyed him steadily; it was a look that cooled his hot blood and made him tremble. But there was no time now to think of a means of making atonement. Nothing remained but to risk the worst till the funeral was over. There was but one way of making sure of her. He locked her into her bedroom.

When he came back some hours after, he found her sitting, very much altered in look and bearing, by the bedside, with a bundle on her lap. She rose, and faced him quietly, and spoke with a strange stillness in her voice, a strange repose in her eyes, a strange composure in her manner.

"No man has ever struck me twice," she said, "and my husband shall have no second opportunity. Set the door open and let me go. From this day forth we see each other no more."

Before he could answer she passed him and left the room. He saw her walk away up the street.

Would she return?

All that night he watched and waited, but no footstep came near the house. The next night, overpowered by fatigue, he lay down in bed in his clothes, with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning. His slumber was not disturbed. The third night, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth passed, and nothing happened. He lay down on the seventh, still in his clothes, still with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning but easier in his mind.

Easier in his mind, and in perfect health of body

when he fell off to sleep. But his rest was disturbed. He woke twice without any sensation of uneasiness. But the third time it was that never-to-be-forgotten shivering of the night at the lonely inn, that dreadful sinking pain at the heart, which once more aroused him in an instant.

His eyes opened toward the left-hand side of the bed, and there stood—

The Dream Woman again? No! His wife; the living reality, with the dream-spectre's face, in the dream-spectre's attitude; the fair arm up, the knife clasped in the delicate white hand.

He sprang upon her almost at the instant of seeing her, and yet not quickly enough to prevent her from hiding the knife. Without a word from him—without a cry from her—he pinioned her in a chair. With one hand he felt up her sleeve, and there, where the Dream Woman had hidden the knife, his wife had hidden it—the knife with the buck-horn handle, that looked like new.

In the despair of that fearful moment his brain was steady, his heart was calm. He looked at her fixedly with the knife in his hand, and said these last words:

"You told me we should see each other no more, and you have come back. It is my turn now to go, and to go forever. I say that we shall see each other no more, and *my* word shall not be broken."

He left her, and set forth into the night. There was a bleak wind abroad, and the smell of recent rain was in the air. The distant church-clocks chimed the quarter as he walked rapidly beyond the last houses in the suburb. He asked the first policeman he met what

hour that was of which the quarter past had just struck.

The man referred sleepily to his watch, and answered, "Two o'clock." Two in the morning. What day of the month was this day that had just begun? He reckoned it up from the date of his mother's funeral. The fatal parallel was complete: it was his birthday!

Had he escaped the mortal peril which his dream foretold? or had he only received a second warning?

As that ominous doubt forced itself on his mind, he stopped, reflected, and turned back again toward the city. He was still resolute to hold to his word, and never to let her see him more; but there was a thought now in his mind of having her watched and followed. The knife was in his possession: the world was before him; but a new distrust of her—a vague, unspeakable, superstitious dread had overcome him.

"I must know where she goes, now she thinks I have left her," he said to himself, as he stole back wearily to the precincts of his house.

It was still dark. He had left the candle burning in the bedchamber; but when he looked up to the window of the room now, there was no light in it. He crept cautiously to the house door. On going away, he remembered to have closed it; on trying it now, he found it open.

He waited outside, never losing sight of the house, till daylight. Then he ventured in-doors—listened, and heard nothing—looked into kitchen, scullery, parlor, and found nothing; went up, at last, into the bedroom—it was empty. A picklock lay on the floor,

betraying how she had gained entrance in the night, and that was the only trace of her.

Whither had she gone? That no mortal tongue could tell him. The darkness had covered her flight; and when the day broke, no man could say where the light found her.

Before leaving the house and the town forever, he gave instructions to a friend and neighbor to sell his furniture for anything that it would fetch, and apply the proceeds to employing the police to trace her. The directions were honestly followed, and the money was all spent, but the inquiries led to nothing. The picklock on the bedroom floor remained the one last useless trace of the Dream Woman.

* * *

At this point of the narrative the landlord paused, and, turning toward the window of the room in which we were sitting, looked in the direction of the stable-yard.

"So far," he said, "I tell you what was told to me. The little that remains to be added lies within my own experience. Between two and three months after the events I have just been relating, Isaac Scatchard came to me, withered and old-looking before his time, just as you saw him to-day. He had his testimonials to character with him, and he asked for employment here. Knowing that my wife and he were distantly related, I gave him a trial in consideration of that relationship, and liked him in spite of his queer habits. He is as sober, honest, and willing a man as there is in England. As for his restlessness at night, and his sleeping away his leisure time in the day, who can wonder at it after hearing his story? Besides, he never objects to being

roused up when he's wanted, so there's not much inconvenience to complain of, after all."

"I suppose he is afraid of a return of that dreadful dream, and of waking out of it in the dark?" said I.

"No," returned the landlord. "The dream comes back to him so often that he has got to bear with it by this time resignedly enough. It's his wife keeps him waking at night, as he has often told me."

"What! Has she never been heard of yet?"

"Never. Isaac himself has the one perpetual thought about her, that she is alive and looking for him. I believe he wouldn't let himself drop off to sleep toward two in the morning for a king's ransom. Two in the morning, he says, is the time she will find him, one of these days. Two in the morning is the time all the year round when he likes to be most certain that he has got that clasp-knife safe about him. He does not mind being alone as long as he is awake, except on the night before his birthday, when he firmly believes himself to be in peril of his life. The birthday has only come round once since he has been here, and then he sat up along with the night-porter. 'She's looking for me,' is all he says when anybody speaks to him about the one anxiety of his life; 'she's looking for me.' He may be right. She *may* be looking for him. Who can tell?"

"Who can tell?" said I.

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